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In strife-torn Manipur, RaGa kicks off Nyay Yatra

Rahul blames BJP and RSS ideology for violence in Manipur

THOUBAL, 14 JAN

Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra began from violence-hit Manipur on Sunday with Rahul Gandhi

He alleged that the people of Manipur lost what is precious to them because of the politics and ideology of the BJP and the "hatred that was spread" by the ruling party and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

He asserted that the party will present a new vision for India that will be based on harmony, brotherhood and equitability and devoid of hatred, violence and monopoly.

In his remarks at the rally, he also slammed BJP-led central and state governments for the situation in Manipur.

At a rally here to flag off the over-6,700-km yatra from Manipur to Mumbai, Gandhi said he had to undertake the yatra as the country was going through a period of "great injustice" and stressed the party wants to listen to people's 'Mann Ki Baat'.

Later in the day, Gandhi embarked on the journey in a bus after it was unveiled by Kharge with top Congress leaders, including chief ministers Siddaramaiah, Revanth Reddy and Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, cheering him on.

The bus travelled from here to Manipur capital Imphal, a distance of about 40 km, with Gandhi interacting with locals who lined up along the route.

The yatra flag-off rally was attended in large numbers by women and youth.

With top Congress leaders on the dais, Gandhi explained the reasons for taking out the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra after his Kanyakumari-to-Kashmir Bharat Jodo Yatra that ended January last year.

"Question arises, why Nyay Yatra? Because we are going through a period of great injustice in India -- social, economic and political injustice. Injustice against the people of Manipur, the traditions of Manipur, but also injustice across the nation," he said.

In the economy, monopolies are being built and a few people are getting access to all the wealth of the country, he alleged.

"One or two businesses have their fingers in everything and the large majority of businesses -- small and medium businesses -- are being destroyed. Huge levels of unemployment and massive price rise is what the whole of India is facing," Gandhi said.

"On the social side, the large mass of India's people -- the lower castes, Dalits and tribals -- simply do not have a say in the governance system of the country. I have given you example upon example of how the large mass of our people are excluded from the political system and from the governance system," he said.

These are the issues that the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is going to raise, "but this is less about us and more about you", he told the gathering.

—PTI

Rahul Gandhi ***Photo: PTI***

'Mukh mein Ram, bagal mein churi'

Thoubal, 14 Jan

In a attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge accused him of using faith for electoral gain and said "one should not do dhongbaazi (deception) for votes". Khar ge alleged that Modi comes to Manipur for votes but when people were in trouble, he did not visit.

—PTI

Maldives asks India to withdraw troops

MALE, 14 JAN

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has asked India to withdraw its military personnel from his country by 15 March, a senior official here said on Sunday, nearly two months after Male sought their removal.

According to the latest government figures, there are 88 Indian military personnel in the Maldives.

In a press briefing, Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim, the public policy secretary at the President's Office, said that President Muizzu has formally asked India to withdraw its military personnel by 15 March, the SunOnline newspaper reported. The Indian government did not immediately confirm the media report or comment on it. —PTI

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Eknath Shinde welcomes former Congress leader Milind Deora who joined Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) in Mumbai. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Deora quits Cong, joins Sena led by Shinde

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

In a setback for Congress in Mumbai ahead of Lok Sabha polls, its young brigade member and former Union minister Milind Deora on Sunday quit the party "to walk the development path". He later joined the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, saying Congress' old character is changed.

Deora, 47, said he believed in the politics of "GAIN" which stands for Growth, Aspiration, Inclusivity and Nationalism and not of "PAIN" which he explained as an acronym for Personal Attacks, Injustice and Negativity.

His decision marks the unease in Shiv Sena (UBT)-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) over the sharing of seats for the upcoming general elections.

Taking a veiled dig at Rahul Gandhi after joining Sena, Deora alleged Congress was not the same as it used to be when Manmohan Singh had launched economic reforms, but it is now abusing industrialists and businessmen, and calling them anti-nationals.

He was welcomed in the Shiv Sena fold by Shinde at his official residence Varsha.

The former Mumbai South MP announced his decision to resign from the primary membership of Congress on social media platform X, ending his family's "55-year relationship with the party".

Days preceding his resignation, speculations were rife that Deora was unhappy with Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) staking a claim to the Mumbai South Lok Sabha constituency which he had represented in the past even though formal seat-sharing talks in MVA are not concluded.

The MVA includes Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress, and the NCP (Sharad Pawar faction). The undivided Shiv Sena's Arvind Sawant, now with the Thackeray faction, had defeated Deora in the 2014 and 2019 general elections. Notably, Deora was recently appointed the joint treasurer of the All India Congress Committee. He had also headed the Mumbai Congress unit in the past. Deora's father Murli Deora had represented the Mumbai South constituency four times. Milind Deora first became a Lok Sabha member from this constituency in 2004 by defeating BJP veteran Jayawantiben Mehta. He returned to Lok Sabha in 2009 again, trouncing candidates of MNS and Shiv Sena (undivided). —PTI

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Lanka arrests 12 men for poaching in its waters

COLOMBO, 14 JAN

Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 12 Indian fishermen and seized their trawlers for allegedly poaching in the island nation's waters, an official statement said on Sunday. The fishermen were arrested, and their three trawlers seized on Saturday off the coast of Karainagar in the northern Jaffna peninsula, the Navy said in a release. They were escorted to the Kankesanthurai harbour for further action, it said. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters. The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries. There have been periodic instances of Indian fishermen being arrested by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. In 2023, the island nation's Navy arrested 240 Indian fishermen along with 35 trawlers for poaching in Sri Lankan waters.—*PTI*

'U'khand likely to be 1st state to implement UCC'

LUCKNOW, 14 JAN

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said Uttarakhand is likely to become the first state in the country to implement a Uniform Civil Code. A Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for Uttarakhand was one of the major poll promises made by the BJP in the run-up to the state assembly elections held in 2022. After being voted to power for a second consecutive term, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami gave his nod to setting up a committee headed by retired Supreme Court Judge Ranjana Prakash Desai to draft the UCC at the very first cabinet meeting headed by him. Addressing the "Uttarayani Kauthik" event in Lucknow, the Union Defence minister said Uttarakhand is not only the land of gods and brave people but is now also being recognised as the land of development. The state has made remarkable progress in the last five years, he said. Referring to the relations between Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, he said, "After Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, there was bitterness in the relationship between the two states for some time. But this was never seen among the people." —*PTI*

ATAL SETU NOW A DIRTY SELFIE SPOT

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Soon after the opening of the 21.8 km-long Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, the were seen flouting rules and regulations. Neztizens on social media platforms posted photos and videos showing people stopping their vehicles, and taking pictures and selfies on a stretch that has a speed limit of 100 kmph.

People have also started littering on the bridge as a photo showed garbage lying on the side. The trans harbour link is India's longest sea bridge and will reduce the time taken for the journey between the two points from the current hour and a half to around 20 minutes.

—*Salar News*

Multiple parked vehicles on the bridge as commuters click selfies ***PHOTO: X***

LIFESAVERS

Around 1,600 police personnel practice CPR on dummies at a 'First Aid training' programme organised by Surgical Society, at Sri Kanteerava Indoor Stadium in Bengaluru on Sunday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

44 FLIGHTS DELAYED AT KIA DUE TO BAD WEATHER

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Nearly 44 departing flights from Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) were delayed on Sunday due to bad weather in different cities, an official said.

According to an airport official, a thick layer of mist at KIA delayed the flights. The fog causing disruptions at KIA is known as radiation fog and is typical during the months of November to February, particularly between 3 am and 8:30 am. In addition to the delays, one flight from Chennai was diverted to KIA due to the weather conditions. Seven New Delhi flights from KIA were delayed due to the bad weather conditions. Also, chaos unfolded in airport due to the delay in flights. Taking to X some passengers blamed the airport authorities. —*Salar News*

B'luru to host GM chess tournament from 18 Jan

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

The first Bengaluru International Grand masters Open Chess tournament will be held from 18 to 26 January at the Sri Kanteerava Indoor Stadium

The tournament is organised by the Bengaluru Urban District Chess Association (BUDCA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Empowerment & Sports, Sports Authority of India, Karnataka Olympic Association, and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, in addition to other associations like Karnataka State Chess Association (KSCA), All India Chess Federation (AICF), and International Chess Federation (FIDE).

The event will be held in three different categories: A category for players with a rating of above 1,900, B category of below 2,000, and C category of below 1,600. The total prize fund of all three events combined is Rs 50 lakh. The association also scheduled a Blitz Tournament on 22 January for players of all ages.

The event is expected to attract 3,000 players from India and 18 other countries, including 50 grandmasters. The vision of the Bangalore GM tournament is to nurture and showcase the immense chess talent of the nation. It also aims to promote chess as a sport, encouraging more youngsters to take up the game and discover their potential. The official mascot for the tournament 'CHESSIE', a blue elephant with a crown and dressed with chess blocks was also unveiled.

—*Salar News*

IN DAVOS

Irani, Vaishnaw to take part in WEF meet with Zelenskyy

DAVOS, 14 JAN

Grappling for answers to crises ranging from climate to conflicts to fake news, more than 2,800 leaders from around the world, including India, have begun gathering in this Alpine resort town for an annual five-day talkathon.

Those present for the 54th World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting beginning Monday would include over 60 heads of state and governments, while Indian presence would be marked by three Union ministers, three Chief Ministers along with their ministerial colleagues and over a hundred CEOs.

A day before the ceremonial start to the WEF meeting, Davos is hosting for the first time national security advisors from 90 countries to discuss a peace plan for Ukraine, which would also be a key point of discussion at the WEF sessions, alongside the Israel-Gaza conflict, threats from AI-generated deep fakes in a bumper election year, climate change, economic slowdown, and a lot many problems before the world.

WEF, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation committed In an online pre-meeting press conference, WEF President Borge Brende said the meeting will take place in a very complicated and the most challenging geopolitical and geo-economic scenario.

The annual meeting, which will be held under the theme of 'Rebuilding Trust' from 15-19 January,will also be attended by nearly 100 political and business leaders from India.

Among global leaders, French President Emmanuel Macron, Chinese Premier Li Qiang, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan will take part.

The Indian delegation would include three Union Ministers -- Smriti Irani, Ashwini Vaishnaw and Hardeep Singh Puri -- as well as three Chief Ministers -- Maharashtra's Eknath Shinde, Telangana's Revanth Reddy and Karnataka's Siddaramaiah.

Describing India as a key country with over 8 per cent GDP growth, Brende said several ministers from the country will attend the meeting despite being in the middle of an election season. —*PTI*

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Over 60 heads of state and governments will takepart in the 54th WEF Annual Meeting beginning Monday ***PHOTO: REUTERS***

NSAs discuss Ukraine peace formula

Davos, 14 Jan

National security advisors of several countries met here on Sunday to discuss a peace formula for Ukraine. They pushed for early restoration of peace in the war-hit country, with the host Switzerland asserting that India can play a key role with its influence and relations with Russia.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Woman stabs BMTC conductor over ticket

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

A woman Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) conductor was attacked with a knife by another female after a dispute over a ticket on Sunday. The incident occurred in a BMTC bus from Nagarur to Majestic at bus Depot-40. A fight broke out between a Bajaj Finance employee and the BMTC bus conductor Sukanya. The altercation began when Sukanya asked the woman to show her Aadhaar card before issuing a ticket. It is alleged that a verbal argument blew into a physical fight. The conductor was admitted to a Nelamangala hospital. The conductor has filed a complaint with the Peenya police station. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: FB

BJP MLA escapes with minor injuries after car accident

KALABURAGI, 14 JAN

BJP MLA Basawaraj Mattimud had a narrow escape on Sunday when his car overturned in an accident here, police sources said.Mattimud, the Kalaburagi Rural MLA met with the accident near Pala village. He was heading towards Shahabad with some other leaders when the car overturned. Luckily for them, the MLA and the others sustained only minor injuries.Mattimud was rushed to a local hospital and his condition is stable, police sources said. *—Salar News*

Missing mentally challenged woman found dead in Mandya

MANDYA, 14 JAN

A mentally challenged 31-year-old woman missing for the past four days was found dead in Nagamangala taluk here on Sunday morning, police said.According to police, the woman's naked body was found in a secluded place in the woods away from the Harsha Grand Hotel on the Bengaluru-Mysuru Highway. The body was sent to the morgue for post-mortem.Police have started an investigation into the case, suspecting it to be a case of rape and murder. Family members had been searching for the woman when they got the information. *—PTI*

Scribe booked for flying drone over Gopalaswamy Hills

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Forest Department has issued a notice to journalist Vishweshwar Bhatt for using a drone camera to at Gopalaswamy Hill in Bandipur Tiger Reserve. Himavad Gopalaswamy Hills is a protected reserve under the Wildlife Protection Act, of 1972. The hills are located in the Gundlupet Taluk of the Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka. The hills are also the highest peak in the Bandipur National Park. Flying drones in and around wildlife conservation is not allowed because they are no-fly zones Ramesh Kumar P, Chief Conservator of Forest, Bandipur told **Salar News** that the forest officials got to know that a social media handle had posted a drone footage of the area. He said, "Investigation revealed that Bhat had filmed and uploaded the video without any prior permission. We issued a notice, and he has agreed to come down for an enquiry." Bhat is charged with violating the Wildlife Protection Act. "We speculate that he might have visited the restricted zone during the evening as our forest officers and rangers won't be there in the field to monitor these actions," he said. *—PTI*

With no doctors, Indira Clinics in City are in coma

During inauguration, govt promised clinics would have a doctor

AMULLYA SHIVASHANKAR
BENGALURU, 14 JAN

The Indira Transit Clinic in Majestic has no nurse, oxygen cylinder or lab technician *PHOTO: SALAR*

The Indira Transit Clinics, established at Majestic and Yeshwantpur bus stations in 2017 to cater to medical emergencies for staff and passengers, are now in a deteriorating state, undermining their intended purpose.

During their inauguration, the Congress government had promised these clinics would have a full-time doctor, nurse, lab technician, oxygen cylinder, and medicines. However, a recent visit by **Salar News** to the clinic at the Majestic station revealed several missing services, including the absence of an oxygen cylinder, nurse, and lab technician.

The clinic, which should be available for emergencies, is closed on most days of the week. Dr Vishwas, the doctor in charge of Indira Clinic in Majestic, said the clinic faced closure due to burst drainage pipes and a cracked roof. "Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Police (BBMP) might consider integrating it into Namma Clinic," he said.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a BMTC staff member said, "We are not even sure if the clinic is open or not. It is not beneficial for us. Instead of spending money on running this clinic, they could provide free or discounted diabetes and blood pressure tablets for the staff."

The clinic building is surrounded with garbage and emits a strong smell of urine. A regular traveller, Umesh, dismissed the clinic as fraudulent. "It opens and closes at the whim of the watchman, with doctors and nurses rarely present," he said.

Apart from the salaries of the staff, the clinic gets Rs 10,000 for maintenance, medicines from Karnataka State Medical Supplies Corporation Limited and money under Untied Grants to be used during emergencies, said Dr Venkatesh, BBMP, in charge of grants.

- The clinics were inaugurated by then transport minister HM Revanna after the success of Indira Canteens. The minister had also planned to set up these clinics in major bus stations

The clinics were inaugurated by then transport minister HM Revanna after the success of Indira Canteens. The minister had also planned to set up these clinics in all the major bus stations but it never saw the light of day. *—Salar News*

SANKRANTI SPECIAL

368 cases against pvt bus owners over high fares

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

Regional Transport Office (RTO) task force registered 368 cases against private bus owners for increasing ticket prices during Makar Sankranti. This action is part of the Transport Department's campaign to curb the exploitation of passengers during festive seasons when private bus operators raise ticket prices significantly.

However, the private bus owners express dissatisfaction with the RTO's actions. They claim that since the launch of the Shakti scheme by Congress government, nearly 20,000 private buses have ceased operations due to a decline in passengers, especially with more people choosing government buses.

In the past three days, the Regional Transport Office (RTO) has deployed eight task forces, each consisting of two RTO inspectors and two officials, to identify buses violating norms. Raids were conducted in various parts of the districts in the state.The RTO is taking action against those who raised ticket prices from Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 during the festival season. When **Salar News** reached out to a few private bus owners in the City, they stated that they have been running at a loss for almost a year, and festivals are essential for their income. Buses operated with 60 per cent empty seats empty during the New Year. This has led to private bus owners hiking ticket prices to compensate for their losses.Natraj Sharma, President of the Private Transport Association, is dissatisfied with the government's response to private bus owners' plight. He said that despite reaching out to Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy, the government has been quiet. He questioned why only small-scale owners are being targeted and not big private bus companies. Sharma argued that private bus owners are increasing prices due to distress, and he criticised the lack of adherence to rules by BMTC and KSRTC. *—Salar News*

BMTC suspends 7 officials for taking bribe

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Bengaluru Mahanagara Transport Corporation (BMTC) suspended seven officers Sunday for taking bribes through online banking platforms such as Google Pay and PhonePe. Reportedly, more than Rs 1 crore has been recovered from the officers' accounts,

The suspended officers belong to Depot No 27 Jigani.

The officers allegedly took bribes from the drivers and conductors to grant them weekly offs, leave from work, and to assign them buses with higher collection prices. The officers allegedly demanded Rs 500 per week from each person which added up to Rs 2,000 per month.

The matter was brought to the attention of Transport and Muzrai Department Minister Ramalinga Reddy in October 2023. The Minister directed the then-managing director G Satyavati to order a probe into the matter.

A probe revealed that the officials regularly receive money from conductors and drivers.

The suspended officers are Manjula R, Staff Supervisor; Pritam, Junior Assistant; Manoj Kumar LS, Junior Assistant; Dhananjaya V, Assistant Accountant; Suma A- Junior Assistant; Shantavva, Junior Assistant; and Devaraja G, Assistant Artisan. *—Salar News*

KEEP YAMRAJ AWAY

Traffic cops and a man dressed as Yamraj, the god of death, give roses to motorists using half helmets and urge them to wear full-face helmets, near Circle Maramma Temple in Malleswaram, Bengaluru, on Sunday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Davangere MP alleges threat to life

DAVANGERE, 14 JAN

GM Siddeshwara *PHOTO: SALAR*

Davangere MP GM Siddeshwara has alleged a threat to his life and a conspiracy to kill him. Siddeshwar said that some individuals are waiting for an opportunity to harm him.

"I am cautious wherever I go. People are lying in wait to harm me, amputate my legs, and poison me to death. There is a plot being hatched to remove me from Davanagere," he said.

The MP also expressed apprehension about consuming food given by others suspecting potential threats.

He participated in a cleanliness drive organised by the Davangere district BJP unit at the Chandramouleshwar temple in Davangere Honda.

At the drive, the MP said that he had been a target for the past four years. He mentioned an attack on his close friend Ashwath, where the assailants blocked and attacked Ashwath's car. Siddeshwara called the threats "blackmail politics" and said he would act according to the law. *—Salar News*

Forest authorities in Belagavi apprehended a gang involved in the illegal hunting of peacocks *PHOTO: SALAR*

Forest officials nab peacock hunting gang

BELAGAVI, 14 JAN

Forest authorities in Belagavi apprehended a gang involved in the illegal hunting of peacocks. The gang is accused of poisoning peacocks for meat.The incident came to light when farmers from Manjari village in Chikkodi taluk, Belagavi district, discovered dead peacocks in their fields. The farmers notified the forest department and local police. Upon arriving at the scene, forest department officials collected the deceased peacocks for further examination, seized the grains at the site. Two teams were formed for the investigation. One of the accused, identified as Manjunath Pawar,is a resident of Jhalki in Aland Taluk of Kalaburagi district. However, two other suspects managed to escape. Investigations revealed that Pawar and his associates poisoned maize kernels, which were then used to kill peacocks for their meat. After hunt, they would sell the peacock meat. *—Salar News*

Will never go back to BJP, says Shettar

BENGALURU, JAN 14

Former chief minister and Congress MLC Jagadish Shettar on Sunday said he will not be returning to BJP. "Several BJP leaders are trying to get me back to the party, but there is no question of 'ghar wapsi' (returning home)," he said.

Speaking to the reporters in Hubballi, Shettar said that he has not forgotten the insults he received while he was a part of BJP. "They have realised my value and the damage that happened after I left. Hence, BJP is trying to pressure some leaders to take me back. No matter what, I am not going back."Responding to a question on 'Operation Hasta' that allegedly poaches BJP leaders to Congress, Shettar said, "Whoever will willingly join, I will welcome them. I took people who willingly wanted to join Congress to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar. I am not a part of any operation, I have never done it."Shettar reacts to Hegde's remarks.

He said, "He should not have addressed Siddaramaiah in such a way. He has crossed a boundary."

—Salar News

Money offered to hush up Haveri gangrape case, says BJP

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

BJP on Sunday said that attempts have been made to hush up the moral policing incident of Haveri in which the police have charged the accused with gangrape, by offering money to the victim.

According to a video that has gone viral, six people barged into a hotel room and assaulted an interfaith couple during their stay in Hangal Taluk of Haveri district on 8 January, following which two of the accused were arrested.

BJP leaders said that under the garb of investigation, the victim was taken to Sirsi after the local police got information about the visit of the BJP women's delegation to Haveri.

"Mahila Morcha of BJP went to meet the victim but the local leaders have transferred the victim somewhere. They are not letting us meet her," said R Ashoka, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly.

Former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai claimed that Haveri police had offered money to the victim to close the Hangal incident.

"The government must constitute a Special Investigation Team to probe this incident. As Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would visit Haveri on Monday, BJP expects him to make an announcement in this regard," he said.

Ashoka also accused the government of being negligent towards the case. He alleged that rowdyism has peaked in the State as the law and order system has failed.

Ashoka said that BJP leaders will protest against the increasing crime rate and claimed that several moral policing cases were reported after Congress came to power.

BJP State President BY Vijayendra accused the police of acting as puppets of the state government and questioned the safety of women from minority communities.

According to the survivor, a 26-year-old married woman who belongs to a minority community, the incident took place on 8 January. She checked into a hotel room at 1pm with a KSRTC driver aged 40, with whom she has been in a relationship for the past three years.

The woman has also said that people close to the accused are pressuring her to withdraw the case, offering her lakhs of rupees.

—Salar News with Agencies

2 ICICI employees killed in accident

BENGALURU, 14 JAN

PHOTO: X

Two ICICI bank employees from Bengaluru died on Sunday after their car rammed into the divider near Maddur and toppled on the Bengaluru-Mysuru 10-lane highway.

The deceased are Shankar and Mahadev. Another passenger Kishore has suffered head injuries and has been shifted to Mandya Institute of Medical Science (MINS).

Reportedly, the driver lost control of the car while they were returning from Mysuru to Bengaluru, and collided with a divider and a camera pole. The car after toppling ended up in the adjacent lane.

Due to the collision, Bank Manager Shankar and Mahadev died on the spot.

Maddur Traffic Police have registered a case.

National Highways Authority of India (BHAI) has called for a tender worth Rs 688 crore to ensure additional road safety on the highway due to the increasing number of accidents.

—Salar News

AFTER ACQUITTAL OF ACCUSED

Court tells POCSO victim to return compensation

MANGALURU, 14 JAN

In a significant development, the First Additional and District Fast Track Court in Mangaluru has ruled that a compensation amount, earlier granted to a victim under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act and Dalit Atrocities Act, should be returned to the government. The case involved a young man, Manjappa, 23, who faced charges under the POCSO Act and Prevention of Atrocities Act but was later acquitted.

Last year, Assistant Commissioner of Police Manoj Kumar Naik registered a case against Manjappa, leading to examination of 39 witnesses. A chargesheet was filed and the trial was presided over by Justice Manjula. However, during the trial, the victim, who had initially received compensation, provided a hostile witness statement, leading to the acquittal of the accused.

Court in Mangaluru has ruled that a compensation amount, earlier granted to a victim under POCSO act should be returned to the govt *PHOTO: SALAR*

In response, Special Public Prosecutor Jyoti Pramod Naik argued for the government's case, emphasising the need to refund the compensation amount. The compensation, totalling Rs 3.75 lakh, had been sanctioned by the Deputy Director of the Social Welfare Department, with Rs 1.25 lakh approved when the FIR was filed and an additional Rs 2.5 lakh when the chargesheet was submitted. The amount was credited to the account of the victim's aunt, as the victim was a minor.

- The case involved a young man, Manjappa, 23, who faced charges under the POCSO Act and Prevention of Atrocities Act but was later acquitted

Considering the hostile witness statement and the acquittal of the accused, the investigating officer requested the court to recover the compensation amount. The court, after evaluating the evidence, directed the Deputy Director of the Social Welfare Department to retrieve the amount. On 26 December, 2023, the department recovered Rs 3.75 lakh from the victim's aunt.

The ruling sets a precedence in cases where compensation has been disbursed but is subject to a change according to the victim's stance during the trial. The court's decision underscores the importance of aligning compensation awards with the outcomes of legal proceedings, ensuring a fair and just resolution in such sensitive cases. *—Salar News*

Modi to arrive in Kerala for two-day visit on 16 Jan

T'PURAM, 14 JAN

Prime Minister Modi will arrive in Kerala two weeks after his visit to Lakshadweep,he will be returning to the southern state for two days on 16 January. Modi is scheduled to arrive at Kochi on 16 January and will hold a roadshow in the port city on that day, according to the BJP's state unit On the next day, 17 January, he will travel to Guruvayur in Thrissur district to attend the wedding of actor-cum-politician Suresh Gopi's daughter, it said. The Prime Minister would then return to Kochi where he will attend a party meeting of around 6,000 in-charges of 'shakti kendras', which comprise two-three booth-level areas. Modi would also be taking part in programmes related to Central government projects and then would return to Delhi by evening, the BJP's state unit said. *—PTI*

Gita Press faces shortage of Ramcharitmanas

GORAKHPUR, 14 JAN

The Gita Press will allow free download of the Ramcharitmanas from its website as it is unable to meet an increased demand for the holy book ahead of the 22 January Ram temple consecration ceremony, an official said. Established in 1923, the Gita Press is one of the world's largest publishers, and according to its manager Lalmani Tripathi, it has published 95 crore books in 15 languages. The Gorakhpur-based publisher, which was awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize last year, has stores across the country. Giving a comparison, he said in 2022, it had printed and distributed around 75,000 copies of the Ramcharitmanas. Since the announcement of the date of the "Pran Prathistha" at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the demand for the book has increased manifold, he said. *—PTI*

Will not contest LS polls from Balasore: Vaishnaw

BALASORE, 14 JAN

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Sunday said he will not contest the Lok Sabha elections from the Balasore seat in Odisha, putting speculations to rest. Speculations were rife that the BJP may field Vaishnaw, a Rajya Sabha MP, in the Balasore seat in the Lok Sabha elections. He was the district collector of Balasore as an IAS officer. "I will not contest from Balasore. We have Pratap 'Nana' here," he told reporters, referring to sitting BJP MP Pratap Sarangi, who is a former Union minister. The speculations were further fuelled by Vaishnaw's extensive visits to various places in Balasore and attending public programmes. He visited the Balasore railway station in the morning, and asked officers to write 'Baleswar', as the place is known in Odia, instead of 'Balasore' in signages. He also visited Jhadheshwar Shiv temple along with Sarangi. He donated an ambulance to the Balasore district hospital, and also went to the AIIMS satellite hospital nearby. *—PTI*

₹5L given to kin of 3 mob lynching victims in M'rashtra

PALGHAR, 14 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde handed over cheques of Rs 5 lakh each to kin of three people, including two sadhus, lynched by a mob in Palghar district in 2020.He handed over the cheques while attending a function in Virar here on Saturday.Sadhus Kalpavriksha Giri Maharaj ,70, Sushil Giri Maharaj ,35, and their driver Nilesh Telgade,30, were killed by a mob while their vehicle was passing through Gadchinchale village late night on April 16 that year in the midst of the Covid-19 lockdown.The case had made national headlines at the time and several people who were allegedly part of the 500-strong mob were arrested and are facing trial. *—PTI*

'Deora's exit is PM's counter to yatra'

Congress dubbed exit as PM's headline management

IMPHAL, 14 JAN

With its senior leader Milind Deora resigning just before the start of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the Congress on Sunday alleged that the timing of the announcement of his departure from the party was determined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for headline management to counter the yatra, and asserted that it will have no impact.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said that one Milind Deora goes away but "lakhs of Milinds who believe in our organisation and ideology stay".

Ramesh said Deora had spoken with him over phone this Friday and requested that he wanted to speak with Rahul Gandhi over his concerns over the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) laying claim to the South Mumbai Lok Sabha seat. Both Milind Deora and his father Murli Deora had served as MPs from Mumbai South.

"He (Deora) said he is concerned that it is a sitting Shiv Sena seat, he wanted to meet Rahul Gandhi and explain to him about the seat and also wanted me to talk to Gandhi about it," Ramesh said."Obviously all this was a farce and he had made up his mind to leave. The timing of the announcement of his departure was clearly determined by thePrime Minister," Ramesh alleged.

Pointing out at the timing of the announcement by Deora, Ramesh alleged that it has been decided by Modiand Deora was "just a puppet".

"The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is in all newspapers, TV, everywhere. So PM is a guru of headline management and has given a headline' 'Milind Deora leaves Congress' ?but this will have no impact," Ramesh said.

"One Milind Deora goes away, lakhs of Milinds who believe in our organisation and ideology stay. Whether they get ticket or not it does nor matter, they get disappointed for a few hours and then again get back to working (for the party). Modi has made Milind Deora's going a headline but this will have no impact on our organisation," he asserted.

In a post on X, Ramesh recalled his long years of association with seven-time Congress MP Murli Deora with great fondness.

"He (Murli Deora) had close friends in all political parties, but was a stalwart Congressman who ALWAYS stood by the Congress party through thick and thin. Tathastu!" he said. *—PTI*

LEADERS WHO QUIT CONGRESS SINCE 2019 AND WHY

Several big names quit Congress since 2019 and they now hold prominent positions in other parties, most of them in the BJP

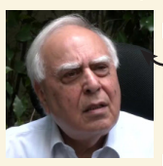
Here is a list of some of them:

Hardik Patel
Gujarat leader Hardik Patel quit Congress in May 2022 and blamed the top brass' lackadaisical attitude. He later joined BJP.

Sunil Jakhar
The Punjab Congress chief quit in 2022 after the leadership's notice for criticising then CM Charanjit Singh Channi. He is now BJP Punjab BJP president

Jyotiraditya Scindia
Jyotiraditya Scindia quit Congress in 2020 with 22 MLAs in MP and helped BJP topple the Kamal Nath government.

RPN Singh
The key backward caste leader quit Congress and joined BJP in January 2022 ahead of UP polls after being sidelined by Priyanka Gandhi.



Kapil Sibal
The ex-Union minister quit Congress in May 2022 two months after he asked Gandhis to step aside from leadership roles.

Amarinder Singh
Ahead of 2021 Punjab polls, he quit Congress and launched his own party, which merged with BJP. He blamed Sonia Gandhi for appointing Navjyot Singh Sindhu as Punjab Cong Chief

Ghulam Nabi Azad
Azad quit the Congress in 2022. He claimed the situation in Congress had reached a point of "no return". Later, Azad floated his own outfit in Kashmir.

'DON'T STEAL, FORM YOUR OWN PARTY'

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday attacked Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar over the split in the Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party and accused them of "stealing parties". The Shiv Sena split in June 2022 after a rebellion by Shinde, while the NCP got divided after Ajit Pawar joined the state government along with eight MLAs in July last year."Some are stealing their uncle's party and some are stealing somebody else's party. Have the guts to form your own party and take us on," he said. *—PTI*

Ramesh claps back at BJP's LS polls claims

IMPHAL, 14 JAN

Jairam Ramesh **PHOTO: ANI**

Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has rejected the BJP's claims that the 2024 poll results are a foregone conclusion, saying "Tiger zinda hai" and that the opposition bloc will repeat the history of 2004 when the saffron party was unseated from power despite its 'shining India' campaign.

In an interview with PTI, Ramesh asserted that only a strong Congress can ensure a strong opposition and the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' is an effort to strengthen the grand old party.

On how the poll preparations will be handled by the party while also managing its east to west yatra, Ramesh said a party organisation is in place and Rahul Gandhi would be part of the campaign despite his preoccupation with the yatra.

"The yatra will end by the time polls start. I expect the elections to start somewhere, maybe in first week of April by which time the yatra would have been over. Meetings can always be held on Zoom. I don't see it as a problem," he said, dismissing concerns that poll preparations may be hampered due to Gandhi's over 6,700km Manipur to Mumbai yatra.

When asked about the BJP's narrative that 2024 poll results were a foregone conclusion and what would he tell them, Ramesh, while borrowing from a popular Hindi film title, quipped, "Tiger zinda hai, that is my constant refrain."

Several BJP leaders have asserted that a third term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi is certain in 2024 and the party has set a target of over 400 plus seats.

On whether he believes that the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) can spring a surprise in the 2024 general elections, Ramesh said, "All I can say is that in 2003, we lost Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, people wrote the Congress off, but in 2004, the Congress formed the government. India was shining at that time."

"History will repeat itself," he told PTI on Saturday evening.

People will be moved more by 'anyay kaal' (period of injustice) of the last 10 years than the dream of 'amrit kaal', Ramesh said."Amrit kaal is a dream, anyay kaal is a nightmare," he added. *—PTI*

'BJP will be largest party after LS polls'

KOZHIKODE, 14 JAN

The BJP is expected to emerge as the single-largest party in the coming Lok Sabha polls, but its tally can be brought down to a level that its potential allies may no longer be willing to support it and instead back the opposition alliance, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has said.

While talking about the opposition bloc INDIA, he said India is a diverse country and he is perfectly prepared to live with the situation where they don't have a "100 per cent agreement in 100 per cent of the states".

He was speaking at the ongoing Kerala Literature Festival (KLF) here on Saturday.

"I still expect that the BJP will emerge as the single-largest party. But I do believe their numbers can be brought down to a level where their potential allies required to form a government may no longer be willing to ally with them and may be willing to ally with us. So we have to give it a try," the former Union minister said in a session, 'India: The Future is Now'.

The diplomat-turned-politician also talked about the difficulties related to seat-sharing among parties in the opposition bloc INDIA -- comprising as many as 28 constituents -- and said he only hopes to have "sufficient agreements" in as many states as possible so that "preventable defeats" can be avoided. *—PTI*

Verdict on TDP Chief Naidu's plea on 16 Jan

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The Supreme Court is scheduled to deliver on 16 January its verdict on former Andhra Pradesh chief minister and TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu's plea challenging the High Court order refusing to quash the FIR against him in the Skill Development Corporation scam case.

Naidu was arrested on 9 September last year for allegedly misappropriating funds from the Skill Development Corporation when he was the chief minister in 2015, causing a purported loss of Rs 371 crore to the state exchequer. Naidu has denied the allegations.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court had on 20 November last year granted him regular bail in the case.

An apex court bench comprising Justices Aniruddha Bose and Bela M Trivedi had on 17 October last year reserved its verdict on Naidu's plea challenging the 22 September, 2023 high court order refusing to quash the FIR against him in the case. The counsel appearing for the state had argued that Naidu's petition for quashing the FIR be rejected as the question about the applicability of section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act does not arise as the provision came into force in July 2018, while the CBI began probing the case in 2017.Section 17A was introduced by an amendment with effect from 26 July, 2018 and the provision stipulates a mandatory requirement for a police officer to seek prior approval from the competent authority for conducting any enquiry or inquiry or investigation into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Prakash Raj says many parties after him to contest LS polls

KOZHIKODE, 14 JAN

Actor Prakash Raj has claimed that "three political parties" are after him to be their candidate for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls not for his ideology but because he is a critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."I don't want to get into the trap," the 58-year-old said at the Kerala Literature Festival (KLF) here. He had contested as an Independent candidate from Bengaluru Central in the 2019 General elections unsuccessfully.

"Now, elections are coming, three political parties are behind me. I have switched off the phone... because I don't want to get into the trap. They are not coming for the people, for my ideology, they say because 'I am a 'Modi basher', you are a good candidate'," Raj said. *—PTI*

Danish Ali joins RaGa's Nyay Yatra

THOUBAL,14 JAN

PHOTO: X

Lok Sabha MP Danish Ali, who was recently suspended by the BSP, on Sunday joined Congress leader Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra here, saying he would be failing in his duty as a politician if he did not participate in the "biggest drive for unity and justice".

Ali has been actively joining Opposition ranks in attacking the BJP and its policies even though the Mayawati-led BSP has maintained a distance from the BJP-led NDA as well as the Opposition bloc INDIA. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) suspended him in December for "anti-party" activities.

Ali sat along with the Congress leaders in the front row on the dias at the Yatra flag-off event in Thoubal on Sunday and later joined Gandhi on the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra bus.

In a post on X, Ali announced after landing in Imphal that he had decided to join the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. He recalled that Rahul Gandhi was the "first leader to express solidarity" with him after he faced a hate "attack" in Parliament when a BJP MP used derogatory words against him.

The purpose of Rahul Gandhi's Yatra is to get justice for the marginalised and the exploited sections, Ali said. *—PTI*

2 more hled for attack on ED officials in WB

KOLKATA, 14 JAN

In connection with an attack on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials at Sandeshkhali on 5 January, two more people were arrested on Sunday taking the number of arrests in the case to four, a senior police officer said.

The ED has stated that three of its officers were injured and their belongings were snatched in an attack on them at Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district when they went to search the premises of Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh in connection with its probe into the money trail in an alleged ration distribution scam in the state.While one of the accused was arrested from a fishery at Nazat, the other was rounded up from Minakha, both in North 24 Parganas district, the police officer said. *—PTI*

FESTIVE TIME

Union Home Minister Amit Shah flies a kite during the celebration of Makar Sankranti festival, in Ahmedabad, Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Shinde attacks Sena(UBT), defends LS ticket to son

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday hit back at Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray over the latter's statements on dynastic politics.

Thackeray had asked people to end dynastic politics while addressing gatherings on his tour of Kalyan Lok Sabha seat, which is represented by Shinde's son Shrikant Shinde, on Saturday.

Justifying his son's candidature, Shinde said," It was the requirement of the party in that period. The party was seeking a well-educated and young face to be fielded in the Lok Sabha election. It gave ticket to Shrikant and we won. Our party's tally increased."

Shinde said while Prime Minister Narendra Modi was taking the country ahead rapidly, Thackeray's chief ministership, between late 2019 and June 2022, had taken Maharashtra back by more than 10 years.

- Thackeray had asked people to end dynastic politics while addressing gatherings on his tour of Kalyan Lok Sabha seat, which is represented by Shinde's son Shrikant Shinde

"That's why we toppled his government. It is unfortunate several infrastructure projects were stopped only to satisfy one's ego," he claimed.Shinde said Thackeray's allegations don't carry any value as the latter gets critical of institutions when a decision goes against him.

Notably, Thackeray himself belongs to a political family, as his father Bal Thackeray was the founder of the Shiv Sena. Uddhav Thackeray's son Aaditya was a minister in the previous state government. *—PTI*

RAM TEMPLE FEVER

BJP leaders participate in cleanliness campaign in temples

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

BJP President JP Nadda on Sunday launched a nationwide cleanliness drive by the ruling party in temples and surrounding areas as he attended the exercise at Guru Ravidas Temple in Karol Bagh here.

Senior BJP leaders, including Union Ministers and Chief Ministers, picked up the broom in different parts of the country as the party looks to build up a fervour in the run up to the consecration of Lord Ram's idol at the Ayodhya temple on 22 January.

Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh Chief Ministers Yogi Adityanath, Bhupendra Patel, Bhajan Lal Sharma and Mohan Yadav joined the cleanliness campaign in Ayodhya, Gandhinagar, Jaipur and Ujjain, respectively.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw attended the exercise at a temple in Baleswar in Odisha. Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Meenakshi Lekhi were among others who cleaned up temples in different places.

BJP President JP Nadda, Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel engaged in a cleanliness drive **PHOTO: PTI**

"Following the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP has decided that from Makar Sankranti to 22 January, we (party leaders and workers) will conduct a cleanliness campaign at several temples and holy premises in the country," Nadda told reporters as he kicked off the campaign.

Nadda said every BJP member is taking part in the campaign in different temples and will also be part of 'bhajan-kirtan' exercises till 22 January.

The choice of Ravidas temple is significant as the revered saint enjoys a huge following, especially among Dalits.

Union Minister of State for Culture Lekhi also took part in the Swachh Teerth campaign in New Delhi.

She posted pictures on X, saying she offered 'shramdaan' at the old Hanuman temple near Connaught Place.The BJP will also be felicitating people's visit to the Ram temple after 22 January, when Prime Narendra Modi will attend the consecration ceremony, and help them in their stay.

Modi has called upon citizens to celebrate the consecration ceremony as Diwali by lighting up diyas at their homes and neighbourhood temples. *—PTI*

India logs 375 new Covid cases

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

India recorded 375 new cases of coronavirus, while the number of active infections has declined to 3,075, the health ministry said on Sunday.Two deaths have been reported from Karnataka in a span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am.The number of daily cases had dropped to double-digits till 5 December, but cases began to increase after emergence of a new variant and cold weather conditions.After 5 December, a maximum of a single-day rise of 841 new cases were reported on 31 December, 2023 which is 0.2 per cent of the peak cases reported in May 2021, official sources said.Of the total active cases, a large majority of these (around 92 per cent) are recovering under home isolation."The currently available data suggests that the JN.1 variant is neither leading to an exponential rise in the new cases nor a surge in the hospitalisation and mortality," the official source said. *—PTI*

Village head shot dead in Punjab

TARN TARAN, 14 JAN

A village head was shot dead by two unidentified assailants here on Sunday morning, police said.Awan Kumar alias Sonu Cheema was getting his hair cut at a salon when he was shot from a point blank range.Awan, who was the sarpanch of village Chabbal, was rushed to a hospital where he succumbed to injuries.Police said efforts were on to trace the assailants and CCTV footage of nearby areas was also being scanned. *—PTI*

Seven booked for marrying off minor girl in Indore

MHOW, 14 JAN

An offence has been registered against seven people for allegedly marrying off a 15-year-old girl in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district, police said on Sunday.Based on a complaint by an official of the women and child development department, a probe was undertaken into the marriage of an underage girl from Mhow to a 24-year-old man from Dhar district, Manpur police station in-charge Arun Solanki said. The wedding took place at a temple in Manpur on 29 November, 2023, it was stated.Documents related to the girl's age were recovered, and the complaint was found correct during the probe, after which a case under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was registered on Saturday evening, the official said.The girl's parents, groom and his father, the priest, who had solemnised the marriage, and two others have been named as accused in the case, he said.Provisions of other acts will be added in the case after recording the statements of the accused, Solanki said. *—PTI*

BSF, Punjab police seize 672 gm of heroin in Punjab

TARN TARAN, 14 JAN

In a collaborative effort, the Border Security Force (BSF) and Punjab Police successfully thwarted a narcotics smuggling attempt on the outskirts of Dall village in Tarn Taran and seized 672 grams of suspected heroin.According to an official statement, acting on specific information from BSF, a joint search operation was launched on Saturday. Around 03:55 pm, the search party uncovered a packet suspected to contain heroin, weighing approximately 672 grams."The illicit substance was carefully concealed with yellow adhesive tape and discovered in a farming field adjacent to Dal village," BSF said in a release.This joint operation marks another significant success in the ongoing battle against narcotics smuggling, showcasing the effective coordination between BSF and Punjab Police in ensuring the safety and security of the region. During the search operation, at approximately 04:25 pm, the joint team made a significant breakthrough by recovering a small Quadcopter drone. The retrieval occurred in a farming field adjacent to Rajoke village in Tarn Taran District. This marks another instance of a Pakistani drone being successfully intercepted a through the collaborative efforts of BSF and Punjab Police, it added.*—ANI*

'UNSC must expand with inclusion of India, Brazil'

Ex-Belgium PM wants UNSC to consider changing power dynamics

KOLKATA, 14 JAN

Belgium Prime Minister Yves Leterme has strongly advocated for the permanent inclusion of India in the UNSC, asserting that such a move will enhance the council's legitimacy and representation.

Leterme contended that there is a need for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to adapt to the realities of the 21st century as it requires representation that goes beyond the structures established in the 20th century.Lauding the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for elevating India's geopolitical stature, Leterme said the country has earned the right to a more robust position in the multilateral arena.

He applauded the new connectivity initiative, the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), emphasising its complementary nature to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).He said, "It complements and completes the one that is designed by the Chinese."

Yves Leterme *PHOTO: PTI*

Reflecting on the geopolitical aftermath of the Ukraine-Russian conflict, Leterme advocated for a more equitable distribution of roles in multilateral institutions, particularly urging greater participation from countries such as India, Brazil, and African nations.

- Leterme advocated for an equitable distribution of roles in multilateral institutions, urging greater participation from countries such as India, Brazil, and African nations

Leterme emphasised the need for a reset in multilateral institutions, suggesting a rebalancing to address the evolving global power dynamics.

He said, "We are all preaching for a better distribution of roles. I think that our multilateral institutions have served us very well after the Second World War. But there is a need to reset and, by reset, I mean we need to rebalance, to make changes in the balance of power."

Regarding rising nations like India, some African countries, and Brazil, Leterme insisted they are entitled to significant roles in the multilateral framework.Leterme argued, "The legitimacy of the work done by the (UN) Security Council would be enhanced if the P5 is enhanced with India and Brazil, making it more representative. You cannot tackle 21st-century problems with 20th-century setups and solutions."

Expressing his support for India's bid for permanent UNSC membership, Leterme said, "The UN Security Council needs to be restructured so that India, Brazil, and some other rising nations have a say and have the right to influence decision-making."The five permanent members are Russia, the UK, China, France and the United States and these countries can veto any substantive resolution. *—PTI*

DECISION WITHIN EIGHT WEEKS

Centre must consider raising hit-and-run compensation: SC

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Supreme Court has directed the Centre to consider whether the compensation amounts in case of death and grievous injury in hit-and-run accidents can be enhanced annually.

The top court asked the government to an appropriate decision within eight weeks and posted the matter for further consideration on 22 April.

The apex court noted that the Motor Vehicles (MV) Act, 1988 provides that in case of death of any person resulting from hit-and-run accident, a compensation of Rs 2 lakh or such higher amount as may be prescribed by the central government shall be paid and in case of grievous injury, the compensation amount is Rs 50,000.

The top court also asked the police to inform the family members of victims of such accidents about the compensation scheme under the MV Act.

PHOTO: PTI

- The top court asked the government to an appropriate decision within eight weeks and posted the matter for further consideration on 22 April

A bench of Justices AS Oka and Pankaj Mithal noted in its order that as per the year-wise reports published by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 55,942 hit-and-run accidents were reported in 2016, while in 2022, the figure stood at 67,387.

"It is evident from records published by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways of the Government of India from 2016-2022 that there were 55,942 hit and run motor accidents in 2016, which increased to 65,186 in 2017, 69,621 in 2018, and 69,621 in 2019. During COVID-19 period, the number of accidents decreased," it said.

The bench also noted an answer given by the road transport and highways minister in the Lok Sabha in March last year.

"If we compare the number of hit-and-run road accidents reported and the number of cases registered for seeking compensation, what stares at the face is that negligible number of victims have taken advantage of the said scheme," the bench said.

It noted that one of the reasons may be that victims were not made aware of the existence of the compensation scheme. *—PTI*

6 die after inhaling toxic fumes in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Six people, including four members of a family, died allegedly after inhaling toxic fumes from coal braziers in two separate incidents in the national capital, officials said on Sunday.

Delhi is reeling under severe cold conditions as the minimum temperature dropped to 3.5 degrees Celsius -- this winter's lowest -- on Sunday morning.

Two children were among the four killed in the incident in Alipur area in outer north Delhi, police said.

The deceased have been identified as Rakesh,40, who was a driver of a water tanker, his wife Lalita,38,their two sons Piyush,8, and Sunny,7,they said.

Police found that the door of the room was locked from inside. "Our teams first broke the glass window and managed to open the door. Later, the team found four people inside of the room in an unconscious state. They were rushed to the hospital, where doctors declared them dead," the officer said.

Prima facie, it seems that all four died due to suffocation, police said. Further investigation and proceedings into the matter has been started under section 174 of the CrPC, they said.

In a similar incident, two Nepal-native men were found dead in their room after they allegedly inhaled toxic fumes from a coal brazier in Inderpuri area of west Delhi, police said.According to the police, the deceased have been identified as Ram Bahadur,57, and Abhishek,22. *—PTI*

Ker cops book youth over 'hand chopping' remark

MALAPPURAM, 14 JAN

A case has been registered against a Muslim youth wing leader here over his recent controversial 'hand chopping' remark.The Samastha Kerala Jemiyyathul Ulama is an association of eminent Sunni scholars with the highest support base among Kerala Muslims.

The action was taken based on a complaint sent to the Malappuram Superintendent of Police (SP) by an individual, they said.According to the complaint, the Sunni youth wing leader's statement could lead to incitement of violence between different groups.Panthaloor, speaking at a recent programme here, had warned of chopping off hands of those who criticise and cause difficulties to the Samastha's scholars. *—PTI*

SMOG CONTINUES TO CHOKE

Dense fog blankets North India

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

A blinding layer of fog shrouded the Indo-Gangetic plains in North India on Sunday, with visibility levels plunging to zero metres at several places.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has advised people to avoid unnecessary travel and to take precautions while driving.

A spokesperson for the Railways said fog impacted the schedules of "22 trains arriving in Delhi."

Satellite imagery showed a layer of dense fog extending from Punjab and north Rajasthan to the northeast. Patches of fog were also visible along the east coast.

An IMD official said dense fog engulfed Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, North Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh starting at 10 pm on Saturday.

"This is the first time this winter season that zero-metre visibility was reported from Amritsar to Dibrugarh across Ganganagar, Patiala, Ambala, Chandigarh, Delhi, Bareilly, Lucknow, Bahraich, Varanasi, Prayagraj, and Tezpur (Assam)," the scientist said.

"It has been the longest duration of dense fog this season. Also, it is the most intense so far," he added.

Commuters should be extremely careful while driving on highways and use fog lights, the IMD said.

At 5:30 am, visibility levels stood at 25 metres in Patiala, Ambala, Bahraich (UP), Purnia (Bihar), and Palam (Delhi), and 50 metres in Amritsar, Chandigarh, Safdarjung (Delhi), Bareilly, Lucknow, Varanasi, Dibrugarh, and Tezpur (Assam). *—PTI*

IMD has advised people to avoid unnecessary travel and to take precautions while driving *PHOTO: PTI*

Cold wave back in Kashmir, minus 4.2° Celsius recorded in Srinagar

New Delhi, 13 Jan

Cold wave conditions returned to Kashmir as the mercury plunged several degrees below freezing point after a day's respite provided by a feeble western disturbance on Saturday, officials said on Sunday.A dry and largely snowless winter in Kashmir has resulted in freezing nights and warmer than usual days as Srinagar's day temperatures were over eight degrees above the normal for this time of the year, officials said here.Jammu recorded the coldest night of the season with the minimum temperature plummeting 4.5 notches below normal to settle at 2.5 degrees Celsius, they said. *—PTI*

Non-essential construction work banned in Delhi

New Delhi, 14 Jan

Central government on Sunday ordered a ban on non-essential construction work and plying of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers in Delhi-NCR amid worsening air quality in the region.Construction work related to national security or defence, projects of national importance, healthcare, railways, metro rail, inter-state bus terminals, are exempted from the ban. *—PTI*

10 flights diverted, 100 delayed due to fog

New Delhi, 14 Jan

A total of 10 flights were diverted, 100 delayed and cancelled at the Delhi airport on Sunday morning as low visibility conditions due to dense fog disrupted operations.100 flights, including overseas services, were delayed and some were cancelled due to the bad weather. *—PTI*

Sanjay Singh claims caller threatened to kill him, Brij

VARANASI, 14 JAN

Police have registered a case after an unidentified person allegedly issued a death threat to the president of the suspended Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), Sanjay Singh, and his predecessor and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh over the phone, an official said on Sunday.

A complaint was received from Singh that on 13 January, a person had called from an unidentified number and threatened to kill them, SHO of Bhelupur police station Vijay Kumar Shukla said.

According to the police, Singh has said in his complaint that on the night of 12 January, someone had called twice on his mobile phone from an unfamiliar number but he did not pick up.

On 13 January, calls started coming again from the same number. The third time he received the call following which the caller abused Kaiserganj BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and threatened to kill them.Sanjay Singh said he disconnected the phone out of fear. But he and his entire family are frightened by the continuous calls coming from that number, according to the complaint.

Sanjay Singh *PHOTO: ANI*

- The third time he received the call following which the caller abused Kaiserganj BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and threatened to kill them

Brij Bhushan has been at the centre of a row after several prominent women wrestlers accused him of sexual harassment and started an agitation in January 2023 seeking action against him.In December last year, the Sports Ministry suspended the Wrestling Federation of India, three days after it elected new office bearers - including Sanjay Singh - for not following the provisions of its constitution.

Sanjay Singh's election had sparked fresh protests from the women wrestlers and their supporters due to his proximity to Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

The BJP MP has denied the allegations against him and later declared that he was "done" with the sport as he has many more responsibilities to look into, including Lok Sabha elections.

Police had filed a charge sheet against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a six-time MP, on 15 June, 2023 under Sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 354-A (sexual harassment), 354-D (stalking) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code. *—PTI*

MOMENT OF CELEBRATION

School students celebrate Pongal, in Chennai on Wednesday. It is celebrated to thank the deities for the New Year's harvest *PHOTO: PTI*

Crew member of detained Vietnamese ship falls into sea

PARADIP, 14 JAN

A crew member of the Vietnamese cargo ship, which was detained following the seizure of cocaine worth Rs 220 crore at the Paradip port in Odisha, was injured after he fell into the sea on Sunday, police said.Twenty-one Vietnamese crew members were detained on the ship.

Around 3 am, the crew member fell into the sea from the ship. However, it was not clear whether he accidentally fell, attempted suicide or tried to escape, police said. *—PTI*

PREVENTING INDIA-BANGLA BORDER CRIMES

Bees & hedges to curb smuggling on border

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

To prevent smuggling of cattle and narcotics, the BSF will now have a second line of deterrence -- a thick hedge of more than 60,000 medicinal plants and 40 bee boxes -- along a three-kilometre fenced stretch of the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal's Nadia district.

"Beehives on the fence" was launched in November last year as part of the central government's "Vibrant Village Programme", and according to officials, it not only aims at preventing cross-border crimes but also generating employment for locals through apiculture and horticulture.The flowering plants will also create an ecosystem for the bees to pollinate, a senior official of the AYUSH department said.

According to the BSF, the bees in the hives act as a deterrent to cross-border criminals and smugglers *PHOTO: PTI*

This stretch along the border has been name "Arogya Path" (healthy street) and QR codes have been affixed which when scanned will give details about the plants, the official said, requesting anonymity. He added that the "path" doubles up as a nursery.Villagers of Kadipur in Nadia have been engaged in different works such as planting and watering the fruit-bearing and aromatic medicinal plants, and digging pits to extend the hedge, as part of the first phase of the project.An official of the Border Security Force (BSF) said 40 bee boxes have been fixed on poles of the metal fence over the last two months with the help of the National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB).The bees in the hives will act as a deterrent to cross-border criminals and smugglers who come closer or dare to cut the fence and breach it for smuggling cattle, narcotics, and other items

Tulsi, Ekangi, Satmuli, Ashwagandha and Aloe Vera are among the plants that will make the hedge. *—PTI*

IAF one of the finest in the world: Chief

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The Indian armed forces have transformed with changing times to meet the challenges of the "entire spectrum of warfare," IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari said on Sunday.

In his address at an event hosted here to mark the 8th Armed Forces Veterans Day, he also asserted that resilient spirit, leadership, and vision of its veterans have laid the foundation of today's armed forces.

"The Indian armed forces, we will all agree, are one of the finest in the world, and have transformed with changing times to meet the challenges of the entire spectrum of warfare," he said.

VR Chaudhari *PHOTO: PTI*

The Indian Air Force, in particular, has grown from a very modest beginning just about 90 years ago, to being "one of the most formidable air forces in the world", the IAF Chief said. *—PTI*

BLOOD AND TEARS

Mourners react during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip
PHOTO: REUTERS

Climate, conflicts, crisis: All big problems in Davos

Be it conflicts in Gaza or Ukraine, climate change threats in Antarctica or Amazon, AI generating a monster like deepfake and its threat to elections, or debt crisis in emerging markets to developed world -- problems are aplenty and all have suddenly reached this small ski resort town on the Alps.

Once known for health tourism, always frequented by skiing enthusiasts and also a home to the Sherlock Homes creator who moved here to help his ailing wife live longer, Davos is also home to the annual week-long pow-wow of global elite in sub-zero temperatures and that has made it into a host for a talkfest for all problems plaguing or facing the world.

For now, it teems with huge billboards atop buildings and even on buses, promoting governments and companies, including Indian, while the narrow roads made even narrower by heavy snowfall are full of lounges set up by the private and public sectors from multiple countries.

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting affair seems to be bigger this year as the city also hosted on Sunday for the first time a meeting of 90 national security advisors from across the world, presumably to discuss a peace plan for Ukraine.

The main event would begin Monday and will continue till Friday.

The snowfall also seems to be much more this time as the first day itself saw roads getting closed and serpentine traffic since morning and snow showers are expected to continue throughout the week.

Flush with nearly three times its usual population, the Swiss resort of Davos is teeming with black business suits for the WEF annual gathering, but it still cannot deter the skiing enthusiasts and those coming for medical tourism.

There are warnings that the snow-laden town in the Swiss Alps can see temperatures dipping to as low as minus 30 degree Celsius at higher altitudes this season. But that does not seem to have dampened the spirits of those having come to the annual talkathon of the rich and powerful from across the world -- something that has become synonymous with this place for over five decades now.

Davos is home to the annual week-long pow-wow of global elite in sub-zero temperatures and that has made it into a host for a talkfest for all problems plaguing or facing the world
PHOTO: REUTERS

The event has also brought thousands of army, police and other security personnel from across Switzerland and some neighbouring countries as well to secure the summit being attended by nearly 60 heads of states and governments.

But it has a much older and fascinating history of its own, being a place of eminence for medical tourism as also winter sports.

Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the famous detective character Sherlock Holmes, moved to this town along with his ailing wife that reportedly helped her live longer.

Once famous for being a summer health resort, Davos has gradually emerged as a major winter sport hub on the Alps, but its biggest claim to fame for the past five decades has been the World Economic Forum's annual meeting every January, beginning 1971.

The Geneva-based WEF is hosting its 54th annual meeting here beginning Monday, where more than 2,800 leaders from across the world will participate in a high-profile talkfest for five days.

To cover this global elite jamboree, there are more than 500 journalists and thousands of support staff as well.

While such a high-profile event leads to all hotels and rental apartments being occupied, the die-hard winter sport fans still throng this place as the WEF week also means relatively smaller crowds in ski areas and on mountain cableways.

The only drawback for tourists is that they cannot stay within the town, which has less than 10 medium-sized hotels and about 40 small ones, including in nearby areas like Klosters and Dorf.

Besides, the so-called WAGs (wives and girlfriends), as referred to by locals and others privately but as partners on record, of those attending the WEF meet are also around in large numbers on ski circuits and at various tourist destinations of the town that comprises two big parallel roads and numerous connecting alleys.

Davos' history as a modern and popular holiday destination dates back to 150 years, when the first winter guests arrived here in 1865. Till then, it was just a summer mountain health resort with a strong reputation for treatment of tuberculosis patients.One day in February 1865, Doctor Friedrich Unger and Hugo Richter from Germany arrived here and began a course of treatment on a bed made from a hay sled covered with boards. The treatment proved successful and both men were able to return to work. Soon after, Unger returned to Davos and worked as a doctor here for over 20 years. *—PTI*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈھ

‘Cultural genocide’ erasing Gaza’s heritage sites

An ancient harbour dating back to 800 BC, a mosque that was home to rare manuscripts and one of the world’s oldest Christian monasteries are just a few of at least 195 heritage sites that have been destroyed or damaged since Israel’s war on Gaza began on 7 October , according to an NGO documenting war damage on cultural sites.

Wiping out the cultural heritage of a people is one of the many war crimes South Africa alleges against Israel in a lawsuit that was heard this past week at the International Court of Justice. It states: “Israel has damaged and destroyed numerous centres of Palestinian learning and culture”, including libraries, religious sites and places of ancient historical importance.

Gaza, one of the world’s longest inhabited areas, has been home to a pastiche of people since at least the 15th century BC, according to historians.

Empires – including the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians and Romans – have come and gone, at times dominating the land of the Canaanites, the ancestors of the Palestinians, leaving relics of their own cultural heritage behind. Greeks, Jews, Persians and Nabateans have also lived along this stretch of coast over the centuries.

Strategically located on the Mediterranean’s eastern shores, Gaza was always in a prime position on the trade routes from Eurasia to Africa. Its ports made it a regional hub for commerce and culture. Since at least 1300 BC, the Via Maris – a route running from Heliopolis in ancient Egypt, cutting across Gaza’s western coastline and then crossing into Syrian lands – was the main route that travellers would take on their journeys to Damascus.

“The crime of targeting and destroying archaeological sites should spur the world and UNESCO into action to preserve this great civilisational and cultural heritage,” Gaza’s Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities said after Gaza’s Great Omari Mosque was destroyed in an Israeli air strike on 8 December.

As a result of that particular strike, an ancient collection of manuscripts kept at the mosque may be forever lost. “The manuscript collections remained in the vicinity of the mosque and are currently inaccessible because of the continuing conflict,” Columba Stewart, the CEO of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML), told Al Jazeera soon after the strike.

The 1954 Hague Convention, agreed to by both Palestinians and Israelis, is supposed to safeguard landmarks from the ravages of war. Isber Sabrine, president of an international NGO that documents cultural heritage, explained that crimes affecting cultural heritage are part of the “collateral damage of genocide”.

Sabrine said, “Israel is trying to erase the connection of the people with their land. It’s very clear and intentional. Gaza’s heritage is part of its people, it’s history and their connection.”

While cultural genocide erases tangible heritage like museums, churches and mosques, intangible heritage includes customs, culture and artefacts. These, too, have been damaged, including the Union of Palestinian artists on Jalaa Street in Gaza City and the well-known clay pots once baked in the city’s al-Fawakhir district.

In a statement to Al Jazeera, UNESCO said: “While priority is rightly given to the humanitarian situation, the protection of cultural heritage in all its forms must also be taken into account. In accordance with its mandate, UNESCO calls on all actors involved to strictly respect international law. Cultural property should not be targeted or used for military purposes, as it is considered to be civilian infrastructure.”

Here’s a closer look at some of the sites that have been destroyed or damaged:

Museums

There are four museums in Gaza, and two have been levelled, the International Council of Museums-Arab (ICOM-Arab) confirmed to Al Jazeera.

The Rafah Museum had completed a 30-year project to curate a collection of ancient coins, copper plates and jewellery, making it Gaza’s main museum of Palestinian heritage. It was an early victim in the war, destroyed in an air strike on 11 October

Farther east and once sitting on a hilltop, Al Qarara Museum (also known as the Khan Younis Museum) was opened in 2016 by Mohamed and Najla Abu Lahia, a husband and wife team who said they wished to preserve a history of Gaza’s lands and heritage for generations to come.All that remains of the museum now are shards of pottery and smashed glass that has been blown out of the widows during an October air strike.

—Courtesy, Al Jazeera

Mosques, churches and heritage sites are among the places damaged and destroyed in Gaza ***PHOTO: AP***

A Mussoorie murder that inspired the queen of crime

Few things are more gripping than a family feud - especially when the relatives involved aren't yours and murder is part of the plot.

Agatha Christie, often called the "queen of crime", knew this better than most and her very first novel, The Mysterious Affair at Styles, treats the reader to an intriguing tale of murder born out of familial strife.

Published in 1920, the whodunnit centres around the murder of a wealthy woman, Emily Inglethorp, whose second husband - 20 years younger than her - is viewed with suspicion by the entire Inglethorp clan, including by her friend and confidante, Evelyn Howard.

The book introduces one of Christie's most iconic characters - the eccentric detective, Hercule Poirot - and like her subsequent books, had multiple suspects, shocking twists, clues hidden in plain sight and the "big reveal" at the end, where the perpetrator of the crime is revealed.

But the novel is also singular in that it is widely thought to be inspired by a real-life murder that took place over a century ago in Mussoorie, a popular hill retreat in northern India.

In September 1911, Frances Garnett Orme, 49, was found dead in her room at the Savoy, an upmarket hotel built by an Irish barrister. A post-mortem report found that Orme had been poisoned with prussic acid - a cyanide-based poison. Her friend, Eva Mount Stephens, 36, was accused of murdering her.

The case made global headlines because of the "peculiarity of the circumstances surrounding it", as one Australian newspaper noted in 1912. British newspapers carried blow-by-blow accounts of the trial with headlines like 'Mussoorie murder trial', 'hotel mystery' and the 'crystal gazing trial'.

Indian author Ruskin Bond, who lives in Mussoorie and has written extensively about the tranquil and verdant hill town, drew a connection between this famous murder and Christie's first book in one of his essays. He says that Christie "used the circumstances of the crime" in her book as the case was "quite a sensation" in its time.

According to reports, Orme had been living in India for more than a decade, and had met and befriended Stephens, a spiritualist who hailed from Lucknow city. Orme, a "lonely woman", is reported to have learnt crystal-gazing and other occult practices from Stephens.

Agatha Christie, often called the "queen of crime", wrote a novel inpired from an Indian hotel murder ***PHOTO: AP***

The two had stayed together at the Savoy for a while, during which time Stephens claimed to have looked after Orme as she was in poor health. But the prosecution accused Stephens of administering poison to Orme to benefit from her will as the latter had left her friend a hefty sum of money, three necklaces and other jewellery.

The defence, on the other hand, claimed that Orme killed herself because of the "unceasing grief" she experienced after the man she came to India to marry died, as well as her own ill-health.

The case confounded many, including the police, because of its twists and turns. For one, the investigation revealed that Stephens had left for Lucknow before Orme had died. Secondly, the room in which Orme's body was found was locked from the inside.

The police also found no medicines in Orme's rooms except for a bottle of sleeping pills and two labels - that of arsenic and prussic acid.

In the early 1900s, buyers had to sign for drugs they bought from a chemist, but the prosecution pointed out that the signature for the prussic acid didn't match the one on Orme's letters.

The prosecution also said that Stephens, in conversation with a friend, had predicted Orme's death six months in advance and had also voiced apprehensions about Orme marrying a physician she was engaged to and leaving all her wealth to him.

But the defence insisted that Stephens was a "most devoted companion" to Orme and that there was no proof that she had either bought or administered the poison to her friend.

Stephens was finally acquitted, with the judge remarking that the "true circumstances of Ms Orme's death would probably never be known".

Christie's book mirrors many of these developments.

Emily also dies due to poisoning, and just like Orme, her body is found in a room locked from the inside. It is revealed at the end that it is her companion, Evelyn, who poisons her - it turns out that she bought the poison in disguise, using a forged signature, and that she had a financial motive for killing her friend.

She also leaves the Inglethorp residence much before Emily's death. So how exactly did she do it? Only Poirot can answer that!

Decades later, the similarities between the cases continue to intrigue fans - Indian crime writer Manjiri Prabhu spoke about the "interesting connect" between Christie's first novel and the Mussoorie murder at the International Agatha Christie Festival in 2022.

Christie wasn't the only author who was inspired by poison deaths in India. Cecil Walsh chronicled a crime of passion that unfolded in Agra - then a territory under the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in British-ruled India - and shocked the world.

In The Agra Double Murder: A Crime of Passion from the Raj, he writes about how Augusta Fullam, an Englishwoman living in Meerut city, and Dr Clark, an Anglo-Indian man, conspired to poison their respective spouses so that they could be together.

Much like in the US and Europe, poisoning cases were common in India in the 19th Century.

The sale of toxic substances, particularly arsenic, was unregulated. In his book, Toxic Histories: Poison and Pollution in Modern India, David Arnold writes about how arsenic poisonings provided the "primary impetus" for framing of the Indian Poisons Act in 1904 to regulate the sale and use of poisons.

"When it came, 10 years on, to review the working of the Poisons Act in 1914, the UP (United Provinces) government referred to two notorious cases of poisoning in the province in recent years - one the Orme murder, the other the Fullam-Clark case," he writes in the book.

True crime remains a fascinating genre and continues to captivate audiences through films, podcasts and web shows.

But for Christie's fans, The Mysterious Affair at Styles will always occupy a special place in this grisly canon. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: REUTERS

Japan flight returns to airport with crack on cockpit window

TOKYO, 14 JAN

An All Nippon Airways domestic flight turned back to Japan's northern airport of Sapporo after a crack was found on the cockpit window, according to the airline and media reports. ANA Flight 1182 was en route to Toyama airport in central Japan on Saturday but had to return to the New Chitose airport for repairs, the airline said. There were no reports of injuries among the 65 people on board. The plane involved is a Boeing 737-800 a different model from the Boeing 737 Max 9 jet that is under investigation by the US Federal Aviation Administration. A plug covering a spot left for an emergency door tore off an Alaska Airlines plane as it flew 16,000 feet above Oregon on 5 January, leaving a hole in the plane. *—AP*

3 migrants drown at US border as Texas blocked their rescue

BROWNSVILLE, 14 JAN

A Texas congressman said on Saturday that three migrants, including two children, drowned while trying to reach the US near the border city of Eagle Pass, where the Biden administration says Texas has begun denying access to Border Patrol agents. US Representative Henry Cuellar, a Texas Democrat, accused the state of failing to act amid escalating tensions between Texas and the US government over immigration enforcement. On Friday, the Justice Department told the US Supreme Court that Texas had taken control of an area known as Shelby Park and were not letting Border Patrol agents enter. The park is in Eagle Pass, which is a major crossing point for migrants entering from Mexico. *—AP*

5 Pak soldiers killed in exchange of fire with terrorists

PESHAWAR, 14 JAN

Five Pakistan Army personnel were killed during an exchange of fire with terrorists in Balochistan province of southwestern Pakistan, the ISPR said. The security forces conducted an operation in the Buleda area of Kech District when terrorists exploded an Improvised Explosive Device on a security forces' vehicle, triggering an intense fire exchange, said the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan Army. The security personnel immediately responded to the fire and effectively engaged the terrorists, killing three of them. However, five soldiers were left dead during the operation. Sanitisation operations are being carried out to eliminate any other terrorists found in the area. *—AP*

US leaders ready Bill to extend govt funding to March

WASHINGTON, 14 JAN

Congressional leaders are preparing a stopgap bill to keep the federal government running into March and avoid a partial shutdown next week. The temporary measure will run to 1 March for some federal agencies whose approved funds are set to run out on Friday and extend the remainder of government operations to 8 March. The stopgap bill, expected to be released on Sunday, would come as House Speaker Mike Johnson has been under pressure from his hard-right flank in recent days to jettison a recent bipartisan spending deal with Senate Democrats. The bill would need Democratic support to pass the narrowly divided House. Johnson insisted on Friday that he is sticking with the deal he struck with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, despite pressure from some conservatives to renegotiate. *—AP*

Taiwan's Prez faces tough time with China pressure

The Prez has no Parl majority as Oppn seeks to re-start China trade

TAIPEI, 14 JAN

Lai Ching-te from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won on Saturday by a comfortable margin *PHOTO: REUTERS*

Taiwan's president-elect Lai Ching-te could face a tough four years in office with no parliamentary majority, an Opposition which wanted to re-start a vexed service trade deal with China and the ever present threat of military action from Beijing.

Lai, from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won on Saturday by a comfortable margin though with less than half the vote but his party lost control of parliament on which Lai will have to rely to pass legislation and spending.

Lai takes office on 20 May.

China wasted little time in pointing out most electors voted against Lai, with its Taiwan Affairs Office saying that the DPP "cannot represent the mainstream public opinion" on Taiwan, though it did not name Lai directly unlike in the vote's run-up when it regularly called him a dangerous separatist.

Lin Fei-fan, a former DPP deputy secretary general who is now a senior member of a party think tank, told Reuters he's "fairly worried" that the new government will have a "very tough" four years especially on China-related issues.

He said Opposition lawmakers, who together form a legislative majority, could step up exchanges with China and ask to re-start a controversial service trade pact which Taiwan shelved a decade ago in the face of mass protests.

"That's what concerns us," he said. "Local governments and Parliament could form a line to pressure the central government."

Both Taiwan's largest Opposition party the Kuomintang (KMT) and small Taiwan People's Party (TPP) campaigned to re-start the trade services pact.

China has rebuffed Lai's calls for talks. Lai and his party reject Beijing's sovereignty claims and say only Taiwan's people can decide their future.

Hu Xijin, former editor of the widely-read state-backed Chinese newspaper the Global Times who remains a prominent Chinese commentator, wrote a social media post that it was irrelevant who Taiwanese voted for when it came to bringing the island under Chinese control ultimately.

"The strength of the mainland is already here, and the will of 1.4 billion people to complete the reunification of the country is also here. Who wins Taiwan's local elections is by no means the most important thing," he wrote.

China had framed the vote as a choice between war and peace and warned electors to make the "correct choice" did not name any candidates it wanted people to support.

Lai I-chung, president of the Taipei-based think-tank the Prospect Foundation, said China was seeking to justify its approach to Taiwan by claiming they were able to end the DPP's parliament majority.

Over the past year-and-a-half China has staged two rounds of major war games around Taiwan and its forces regularly operate in the Taiwan Strait. China has also restricted or made more expensive some trade with Taiwan.

—PTI

AMID DIPLOMATIC ROLE

Maldives asks India to withdraw troops by 15 March

There are 77 Indian military personnel in the Maldives *PHOTO: X*

MALE, 14 JAN

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has asked India to withdraw its military personnel from his country by 15 March, a senior official here said on Sunday, nearly two months after Male sought their removal.

According to the latest government figures, there are 88 Indian military personnel in the Maldives.

Maldives and India have set up a high-level core group to negotiate the withdrawal of troops. The group held its first meeting at the Foreign Ministry Headquarters in Male' on Sunday morning.

The meeting was also attended by Indian High Commissioner Munu Mahawar, the report said.

The Indian government did not immediately confirm the media report or comment on it.

Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives on 17 November last year, Muizzu, who is regarded as a pro-China leader, formally requested India to withdraw its military personnel from his country, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi.

The request for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel comes amid a row between the two nations in the backdrop of derogatory comments posted by three deputy ministers of the Muizzu government against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

During his just-concluded state visit to China, Muizzu sought to align Maldives closer to Beijing.

Speaking to the press on Saturday after returning from China, President Muizzu indirectly attacked India. *—AP*

100 DAYS OF WAR

Defiant Bibi says even world court cannot stop Israel

Israel has been under growing international pressure to end the war, which has killed more than 23,000 *PHOTO: REUTERS*

GAZA STRIP, 14 JAN

Israel will pursue its war against Hamas until victory and will not be stopped by anyone, including the world court, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a defiant speech on Saturday, as the fighting in Gaza approached the 100-day mark.

Netanyahu spoke after the International Court of Justice at The Hague held two days of hearings on South Africa's allegations that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians, a charge Israel has rejected as libelous and hypocritical. South Africa asked the court to order Israel to halt its blistering air and ground offensive in an interim step.

"No one will stop us, not The Hague, not the axis of evil and not anyone else," Netanyahu said in televised remarks on Saturday evening, referring to Iran and its allied militias.

The case before the world court is expected to go on for years but a ruling on interim steps could come within weeks. Court rulings are binding but difficult to enforce. Netanyahu made clear that Israel would ignore orders to halt the fighting, potentially deepening its isolation.

Israel has been under growing international pressure to end the war, which has killed more than 23,000 Palestinians in Gaza and led to widespread suffering in the besieged enclave but has so far been shielded by US diplomatic and military support. In more fallout from the war, the world court this week heard arguments on South Africa's complaint against Israel. South Africa cited the soaring death toll and hardships among Gaza civilians, along with inflammatory comments from Israeli leaders presented, as proof of what it called genocidal intent.

In counter arguments on Friday, Israel asked for the case to be dismissed as meritless. Netanyahu and his army chief, Herzl Halevi, said they have no immediate plans to allow the Palestinians to northern Gaza. —AP

N Korea launches ballistic missile towards South Korea

SEOUL, 14 JAN

It is the North's first missile launch since it test-fired Hwasong-18 solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile *PHOTO: PTI*

North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward the sea on Sunday, its first missile launch in about a month, its neighbours said.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launch occurred Sunday but gave no further details like how far the weapon flew.

Japan's Defense Ministry also said it detected a possible ballistic missile launch by North Korea but gave no other details.

It is the North's first missile launch since it test-fired its Hwasong-18 solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile, the North's most advanced weapon, on 18 December. The Hwasong-18 is designed to strike the mainland US.

Sunday's launch came days after North Korea fired a barrage of artillery shells near the tense sea border with South Korea, prompting South Korea to conduct similar firing exercises in the same area.

In recent days, North Korea has also been escalating its warlike rhetoric against its rivals. Earlier this week, leader Kim Jong Un called South Korea "our principal enemy" and threatened to annihilate it if provoked.

- Sunday's launch came days after North Korea fired a barrage of artillery shells near the tense sea border, prompting South Korea to conduct similar firing exercises.

Experts say Kim will likely further raise animosities by test-firing more missiles to try to raise the stakes in the standoff with his rivals and influence the results of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential election in November.

In a key ruling party meeting in late December, Kim vowed to expand his nuclear arsenal and launch additional spy satellites to cope with what he called US-led confrontational moves. *—PTI*

Muizzu's party loses Male Mayoral poll

MALE, 14 JAN

In a setback to Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the pro-India opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has secured a landslide victory in the capital Male's Mayoral election.

The MDP candidate, Adam Azim, has been elected as the new mayor of Male, a post held by Muizzu till recently. Muizzu resigned from the position to contest the presidential elections last year.

The Maldives media reported Azim's win as a "landslide" and "victory by a large margin".

The MDP is headed by pro-India former president Mohammad Solih, who was defeated by Muizzu, a pro-China leader, in the presidential elections.

With 41 boxes counted, Azim has taken a huge lead with 5,303 votes. His rival Aishath Azima Shakoor of Muizzu's People's National Congress (PNC) got 3,301 votes, Maldives' Sun Online news portal reported.

The poll on Saturday was marked by a low turnout, according to reports.

The Mayoral election victory is expected to revive the political fortunes of the MDP, which still holds a majority in the Parliament. *—PTI*

US CLIMATE ENVOY JOHN KERRY TO LEAVE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, 14 JAN

John Kerry *PHOTO: REUTERS*

John Kerry, the US special envoy on climate, is stepping down from the Biden administration in the coming weeks, according to two people familiar with his plans.

Kerry, a longtime senator and secretary of state, was tapped shortly after Joe Biden's November 2020 election to take on the new role created specifically to fight climate change on behalf of the administration on the global stage.

Kerry was one of the leading drafters of the 2015 Paris climate accords and came into the role with significant experience abroad, as secretary of state during the Obama administration and from nearly three decades as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Biden's decision to tap Kerry for the post was seen as one way the incoming president was making good on his campaign pledge to battle climate change. *—AP*

Nepal, India to better border connectivity

KATHMANDU, 14 JAN

Nepal and India have expressed a commitment to implementing bilateral initiatives aimed at further strengthening the seamless cross-border connectivity. This comes as the officials from the two sides met to discuss ways to fortify the economic and commercial linkages.

The India-Nepal Inter-Governmental Sub-Committee (IGSC) on Trade, Transit, and Cooperation to Combat Unauthorised Trade convened its latest session in Kathmandu on 12-13 January.

Both sides also discussed mutual market access for pharmaceuticals and Ayurvedic products. The Indian side highlighted the need for an IPR regime by the provisions of the Paris Convention for encouraging Foreign direct investment (FDI). The focus on bilateral initiatives aimed at further strengthening the seamless cross-border connectivity between India and Nepal including through the construction of new Integrated Check Posts. The agenda also covered discussions on the review of the Treaty of Transit and the Treaty of Trade, proposed amendments to existing agreements, strategies for enhancing investment, the harmonisation of standards and the development of trade infrastructure. *—PTI*

US sent pvt message to Iran amid Yemen strikes

WASHINGTON, 14 JAN

Joe Biden *PHOTO: AFP*

President Biden says the US has delivered a "private message" to Iran about the Houthis in Yemen after the US carried out a second strike on the group.

"We're confident we're well-prepared," he said.

The US said its latest strike was a "follow-on action" targeting radar.

Iran denies involvement in attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea.

However Tehran is suspected of supplying the Houthis with weapons, and the US says Iranian intelligence is critical to enabling them to target ships. Joint UK-US airstrikes targeted nearly 30 Houthi positions in the early hours of Friday with the support of Western allies including Australia and Canada.

A day later, the US Central Command said it carried out its latest strike on a Houthi radar site in Yemen using Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles.

UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Britain had "no choice" but to take military action against the Houthis in Yemen, in response to their attacks on ships in the Red Sea. *—BBC News*

PM VISITS CAMPS

Infectious diseases on rise after quake in Japan

TOKYO, 14 JAN

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida meets evacuees at an evacuation center in Wajima, Japan on Sunday *PHOTO: REUTERS*

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Sunday the country's north-central region of Noto for the first time since the deadly 1 January earthquakes. The visit comes amid growing concern about slow relief work and the spread of diseases in evacuation centres.

The magnitude 7.6 earthquake left 220 dead and 26 others still are missing while injuring hundreds. More than 20,000 people, many of whom had their homes damaged or destroyed, are taking refuge at about 400 school gymnasiums, community centres and other makeshift facilities, according to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency report.

Road damage has hampered rescue efforts, and though relief supplies have reached most regions affected by the quake, hundreds of people in isolated areas are getting little support. Additionally, in the hard-hit towns of Noto, Wajima and Suzu, elderly residents account for half their population, and many are facing growing risks of deteriorating health, officials and experts say.

Kishida, in his disaster-response uniform, visited a junior high school that has turned into an evacuation centre in Wajima where officials showed him the evacuees' severe living conditions. They also spoke about the potential risk of spreading infectious diseases, such as influenza, Covid-19 and stomach flu due to the lack of running water.

- More than 20,000 people, many of whom had their homes damaged or destroyed, are taking refuge at about 400 camps.

To prevent possible health problems and risk of death at evacuation centres, local and central government officials said they would provide the evacuees free accommodation at hotels and apartments — further away from their neighborhoods — until temporary housing was ready. But many of the locals have refused to move out, worried about their destroyed homes, belongings and communities.

Ishikawa Gov. Hiroshi Hase urged on Friday the residents to temporarily relocate to the recommended facilities to rest better and "protect your lives."

Mototaka Inaba, a medical doctor who heads an international relief organisation Peace Winds Japan, told an NHK talk show on Sunday that a secondary evacuation of elderly residents was critical from a medical perspective but should be done in a way that didn't isolate them.

Many have criticised Kishida's government over what they called a slow disaster response.

The cabinet has approved about $32 millionfor relief efforts and is backing the call for a secondary evacuation, including to facilities in the capital region. *—AP*

Interim Budget may see measures to boost consumption

Experts said one way to boost consumption is to put more money in hands of people

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is likely to step up efforts to boost consumption and rural economy while keeping inflation under check when she presents her sixth straight Budget on 1 February .

Experts said one way to boost consumption is to put more money in the hands of people, and one of the possible ways of doing it is by reducing the tax burden through tinkering with tax slabs or increasing the standard deduction.

Another proposal is related to increasing the funds under the rural employment guarantee scheme MGNREGA and higher payout for farmers.

Women and marginalised communities may get additional sops as part of Sitharaman's effort to boost consumption ahead of the general elections, experts said.

Women and marginalised communities may get additional sops as part of Sitharaman's effort to boost consumption

PHOTO: PTI

Usually, interim Budgets, which are presented in the LokSabha ahead of the general elections, do not contain fresh tax proposals or new schemes.

In the interim Budget, the government will seek permission from Parliament to meet its expenses for four months of the 2024-25 fiscal.

It may contain proposals to address immediate economic problems, which cannot wait 4 months when the full budget is presented after the formation of the new government.

- According to experts, there is an urgency to address the issues concerning slack consumption demand in the economy

According to experts, there is an urgency to address the issues concerning slack consumption demand in the economy. Deloitte India Partner RajatWahi said that in the case of FMCG and most of the products people consume on a daily basis, consumer goods companies have increased the prices in 8-10 quarters mainly due to an increase in input costs.

"So, global supply chain impact, input prices going up, inflationary impact, interest rates going up, all of this is impacting the lower income. It's not only rural, it is the poor segment of urban areas where are seeing these issues," Wahi said.

Wahi said the bigger impact of the price rise is being felt by the poorer section of society as the number of loan defaults has significantly increased, he added.

"The agriculture growth has not been what the government had anticipated. The plan was to double agri income, we haven't seen that come through as yet because of inflation," Wahi added.

According to advance estimates of GDP, the agriculture sector growth is expected to decelerate to 1.8 per cent in the current fiscal from 4 per cent in 2022-23. —*PTI*

RELIANCE SHINES

Five of the top-10 most-valued firms added Rs 1,99,111.06 crore in market valuation last week

PHOTO: X

Mcap of 5 of top 10 valued firms jumps ₹1.99L cr

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Five of the top-10 most-valued firms added Rs 1,99,111.06crore in market valuation last week, with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainer, in-tandem with bullish sentiments.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 542.3 points or 0.75 per cent. Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty surged over 1 per cent to hit their fresh all-time highs on Friday.

While Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), ICICI Bank, Infosys and BhartiAirtel were the gainers from the top-10 pack, HDFC Bank, Hindustan Unilever, ITC, State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) were the laggards, taking a combined hit of Rs 76,098.67 crore. Reliance Industries added Rs 90,220.4 crore taking its market valuation to Rs 18,53,865.17crore.

The valuation of TCS jumped Rs 52,672.04 crore to Rs 14,20,333.97crore. Shares of Tata Consultancy Services climbed nearly 4 per cent on Friday after the company reported an 8.2 per cent growth in net income for the December quarter at Rs 11,735 crore.

The market valuation of Infosys climbed Rs 32,913.04 crore to Rs 6,69,135.15crore. Shares of Infosys jumped 8 per cent on Friday after the company's December quarter earnings came in-line with market expectations.

BhartiAirtel's valuation surged Rs 16,452.93 crore to Rs 6,05,299.02crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank rallied Rs 6,852.65 crore to Rs 7,04,210.07crore. However, the mcap of HDFC Bank eroded by Rs 32,609.73 crore to Rs 12,44,825.83 crore.

The valuation of Hindustan Unilever tumbled Rs 17,633.68 crore to Rs 5,98,029.72crore. The mcap of LIC fell by Rs 9,519.13 crore to Rs 5,24,563.68 crore and that of ITC declined by Rs 9,107.19 crore to Rs 5,82,111.90 crore.

State Bank of India's valuation dipped Rs 7,228.94 crore to Rs 5,65,597.28crore. Reliance Industries retained the title of the most-valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bankand Infosys. —*PTI*

Rapido posts ₹675 cr in losses in FY23, revenue up 3X

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Bike-taxi startupRapido saw its losses surge nearly 54 per cent in the last fiscal year (FY23) to Rs 675 crore, from Rs 439 crore in FY22.An increase in riders' cost, IT and employee benefits were behind Rapido's surging losses in the last fiscal year.Incentives and charges paid to riders accounted for 44 per cent of the overall expenditure, reports Entrackr.This cost was Rs 517 crore in FY23, from Rs 214 crore in FY22. Meanwhile, the startup's revenue from operations jumped 3 times to Rs 443 crore in FY23 from Rs 145 crore in FY22, according to its financial statements filed with the Registrar of Companies (RoC).Last month, the bike-taxi startup announced its entry into the cab business, with launching an intra-city, SaaS-based mobility solution with RapidoCabs.With a 60 per cent market share in bike taxis, the startup has expanded its footprint with Rapido Cabs, introducing an initial fleet of 1 lakh vehicles.Rapido, which was founded in 2015, now operates in over 100 cities and has over 25 million app downloads. —*IANS*

Hope airfares come to right sweet spot, says Vistara CEO

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Emphasising that airfare is a function of supply and demand, full-service carrier Vistara's chief VinodKannan has expressed hope that ticket prices will come to the "right sweet spot where customers will travel and airlines can make money".

Vistara, a joint venture between Tata Group and Singapore Airlines, currently, operates around 320 flights daily.To a query on concerns in certain quarters about air ticket prices going irrationally high, the airline CEO said the thing with airfares is that people complain when it goes high and no one compliments when it goes down.Kannan said that certain measures are in place to ensure that airfares are not irrational, especially when there are natural calamities or when something unfortunate happens. In such situations, "we want to make sure that it is not a price-gouging opportunity," he said."If you look at it on a year-on-year basis, the average price of a ticket, in fact, for the last 20 years, has not changed between Delhi and Mumbai. If you look at the average fare a person paid in the early 2000s and compared to how much they pay today, you will find there is not much of a change, but costs have gone up," Kannan noted.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Luxmi Tea plans retail expansion, sell in airports

KOLKATA, 14 JAN

Luxmi Tea, which owns the iconic Makaibari brand, plans to expand its retail presence across the country, an official of the company said.The company has already opened stores to sell its premium tea inside Kolkata and Bagdogra airports, and also inside the international terminal of Mumbai airport."The retail and online channels of our tea sales are growing fast. Presently, online and retail constitute less than ten per cent of overall sales," MD of Luxmi Tea RudraChatterjeesaid.Luxmi Tea, which has gardens in West Bengal, Assam and Rwanda in Africa, produces around 25 million kilogramme of the crop annually, Chatterjeesaid.He said, "We have started with three airports at present. Preliminary talks are on to open more retail stores in other airports like Bengaluru and Delhi as well".According to him, the stores have been branded after 'Makaibari' and sells the iconic tea and other premium Luxmi products at the airport outlets.The airport stores will also sell branded accessories like cups and saucers, besides caddies and gifting boxes. —*PTI*

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have adopted a cautious stance and put around Rs 3,900 crore in Indian equities in the first two weeks of this month

PHOTO: PTI

FPIs infuse Rs 3,900 cr in equities during 1-12 Jan

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have adopted a cautious stance and put around Rs 3,900 crore in Indian equities in the first two weeks of this month, against the backdrop of uncertainty over the interest rate scenario.

The investment has slowed down compared to Rs 66,134 crore attracted in the entire December.

Before that, FPIs invested Rs 9,000 crore in November.According to data with the depositories, foreign investors made a net investment of Rs 3,864 crore in Indian equities this month (till 12 January). The latest investment pattern could be largely attributed to investors booking profit with Indian equity market trading near its all-time high level, said HimanshuSrivastava, Associate Director – Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Adviser India.Moreover, uncertainty over the interest rate scenario could have also prompted them to stay on the sidelines and wait for further cues, before taking investment decision with respect to investing in emerging markets like India, he said. Continuing geopolitical conflicts are also a persistent risk, which foreign investors are cognisant of while making investment decisions, he added. Meanwhile, FPIs continue to be bullish on the debt market and injected Rs 7,912 crore during the period under review, the data showed. This came following a net investment of Rs 18,302 crore in December. —*PTI*

India electronics exports to US jump to USD 6.6 bn: ICEA

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Electronics exports from India to the US jumped over two-fold year-on-year to USD 6.6 billion during January-September 2023, industry body ICEA has said.

India Cellular and Electronics Association Chairman Pankaj Mahindroo told PTI that this is an all-time high electronics export from India, while the share of electronics imported from China into the US market has declined.

"Recent data highlights a notable surge in India's electronics exports to the US, which increased by approximately 253 per cent to an estimated USD 6.6 billion in the current year (January-September), compared to an estimated USD 2.6 billion in the same period last year," Mohindroo said.

According to data shared by ICEA, India's electronics exports to the US increased by more than 300 per cent from an estimated USD 1.3 billion in 2018 to an estimated USD 4.5 billion in 2022.The bilateral electronics trade between India and the US has also seen an impressive rise of 84 per cent, with the current estimate standing at USD 9 billion during January-September 2023 from an estimated USD 4.9 billion in the same period preceding fiscal.In August 2023, ICEA launched the Indo-US Task Force for Electronics with a mission to increase the bilateral electronics trade from USD 8.4 billion in the last fiscal to an ambitious USD 100 billion in a decade."The Indo-US Task Force for Electronics is not just about numbers. It's about setting a precedent. With the current trade estimated at USD 9 billion in 9 months, we have seen good improvement. Our goal now is to capitalise on this momentum and significantly elevate our position in the US electronics market," Indo-US Task Force on Electronics Chairman RS Sharma said. —*PTI*

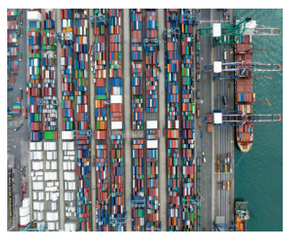


PHOTO: PTI

Automobile exports dip 21 pc in 2023: SIAM

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

India's automobile exports fell by 21per cent in the past year, attributed to ongoing monetary and geopolitical challenges in various overseas markets, according to the latest SIAM data.Automobile shipments from India declined 21 per cent last year as many overseas markets continued to face monetary and geopolitical crises, as per the latest SIAM data.Overall exports stood at 42,85,809 units last year compared to 52,04,966 units in 2022. Passenger vehicle shipments rose 5 per cent to 6,77,956 units last year from 6,44,842 units in 2022. However, other segments like commercial vehicles, two-wheelers and three-wheelers saw a decline in exports last year. Two-wheeler exports slipped 20 per cent to 32,43,673 units last year from 40,53,254 units in 2022.

Similarly, commercial vehicle shipments declined to 68,473 units last year from 88,305 units.Three-wheeler exports declined 30 per cent to 2,91,919 units last year from 4,17,178 units. —*PTI*

Central Bank of India extends festival offer

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

State-owned Central Bank ofIndia has extended its festival offer for three months till March 31 with a view to increasing its retail asset book. Earlier, the offer was till 31 December, 2023. The bank is offering low interest rate, waiver in processing fee and other facilities for customers during this period, Central Bank ofIndia general manager (retail assets) Vivek Kumar said.

Cent Grih Laxmi Scheme and Cent Business Scheme are offering the lowest rate of interest across the industry starting from 8.35 per cent.

Last week, the bank also held meeting with major real estate developers across Delhi-NCR.

About 150 Direct Sales Agents (DSAs) and 50 renowned builders across the region joined the event. He also said that interest rates on most of the products have peaked. —*PTI*

TCPL to expand oriental cuisine space

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) now plans to tap pharma channels as the acquisition of Organic India would provide a "fully rounded portfolio" combined with healthy offering from its own brands, said MD and CEO Sunil D'Souza on Sunday.

Also, the acquisition of Capital Foods, which has brands including Smith & Jones and Ching's Secret, will address the western cuisine and 'desi Chinese' flavours, which it plans to extend to the oriental cuisine space, he said.

Combined with its own brand Sampann, under which it offers Indian food and spices, TCPL now aims to offer a wide gamut of the Indian culinary palate with Ching's Secret, and Smith & Jones.

"We now have the brands that were required to address the entire portfolio of the Indian consumer's cuisines per se," D'Souza told PTI. —*PTI*

Reliance seeks minimum USD 10 for coal-seam gas

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Reliance Industries Ltd is seeking a minimum USD 10 rate for the gas it plans to produce from coal seams, as it altered its pricing formula to reflect the changed energy scenario.

Reliance has sought bids from users for 0.90 million standard cubic meters per day of gas it will produce from coal-bed methane (CBM) block SP (West)_ CBM-2001/1 in Madhya Pradesh. —*PTI*

ONGC makes gas discoveries in Mahanandi

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has made two significant back-to-back natural gas discoveries in a Mahanadi basin deepwater block in the Bay of Bengal as its calculated game plan of venturing into high-risk deep water exploration starts yielding results. The firm made the discoveries in the block MN-DWHP-2018/1, which it had won in the third round of auction under the open acreage licensing policy in 2019, two sources with direct knowledge of the development said. Significantly, the discoveries have been made in an area, which previously was classified as a 'no-go' area because of national security interests. The first discovery, named Uktal, is in 714 metres of water depth and flowed more than 3 lakh cubic metres per day of gas during initial testing, they said, adding the other find is at a water depth of 1,110 metres.—*PTI*

REITs, InvITs see robust growth; fund mobilisation rises to ₹11,474 cr

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

REITs and InvITs have gained popularity as preferred investment options, with fundraising, throughthe route, surging 10-fold year-on-year to Rs 11,474 crorein 2023, supported by measures taken by regulator Sebiand attractive returns offered by the instruments.Going ahead, fund mobilisation by REITs (real estate investment trusts) and InvITs (infrastructure investment trusts) is poised for significant growth in 2024, driven by several key factors, including anticipation of rate cuts and introduction of a range of policies aimed at encouraging investments like tax incentives and relaxed investment norms, Claravest Technologies co-founder ManakiParulekar said. "This year, we are likely to see interest rates decrease in the first half of 2024 due to the expected drop in inflation.These conditions are favourable for investors who are looking to invest in long-term opportunities,suchas REITs and InvITs," he added.According to data compiled by Prime Database.com, REITs and InvITs collectively raised Rs 11,474 crore in 2023 compared to a record low amount of Rs 1,166 crore clocked in 2022. Before that, funds to the tune of Rs 17,641 crore were collected through the route in 2021 and Rs 29,715 crore in 2020, the data showed.

PHOTO: PTI

REITs and InvITs are new concepts in the Indian market but have been a popular choice globally for theirlucrative returns and capital appreciation. A REIT is made up of a portfolio of commercial real estate assets, the majority of which are already leasedout, and InvITs consist of a portfolio of infrastructure assets like highways. —*PTI*

NEW GAMECHANGER

GenAI to help 60% of Asia's top firms boost worker retention

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

Around 60 per cent of Asia's top companies will upgrade hardware and software technologies by 2025 to increase worker retention with personalised work experiences and enhanced collaboration, according to a new report.

Generative AI emerges as a game-changer for organisational advancement, weaving a seamless tapestry across three key fronts: Intelligent Document Processing (IDP), Generative Automation, and Knowledge Sharing.

"By 2026, businesses that link GenAI to smart document handling will discover 20 per cent more ways to use it, boosting productivity, scalability, and delivering better customer experiences," the IDC report predicted.

PHOTO: IANS

Business teams using code generation copilots will achieve a 70 per cent success rate in streamlining jobs with task/workflow automation, replacing low-code and IT-supported development by 2024.

In 2025, GenAI tools will enable senior leaders to double the productive use of unstructured data by discovering untapped insights and knowledge, driving 20 per cent growth in sustainable business benefits, the report noted.

"The focus on skill development becomes a necessity and a strategic imperative, as GenAI enables personalised development. Simultaneously, the reimagination of workplaces, with digital twins and sustainability stand out as key foci for companies," said Dr Lily Phan, Research Director, Future of Work, IDC Asia/Pacific.

By 2027, 40 per cent of current job roles will be redefined or eliminated across organisations accelerated by GenAI adoption. Enterprises will leverage personalised technology skills development to drive $1 trillion in productivity gains by 2027, enabled by GenAI and automation everywhere, the report said. —*IANS*

PHOTO: AP

Marsh announces retirement from professional cricket

SYDNEY, 14 JAN

Australian cricketer Shaun Marsh on Sunday announced his retirement from professional cricket, with the Melbourne Renegades' fixture against Sydney Thunder in the Big Bash League on Wednesday being his last assignment.He joins former Australian skipper Aaron Finch in retirement."I have loved playing for the Renegades. I've met some great people over the last five years, and the friendships I've made will last a lifetime," Marsh, 40, said in a statement to the Renegades."To the Renegades' coaches and staff and everyone behind the scenes, thank you for backing me in from the start and over my final years.—*AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Wehrlein wins Mexico E-Prix, Jehan finishes 16th

MEXICO CITY, 14 JAN

Indian racer Jehan Daruvala endured a disappointing Formula E debut as he finished 16th at the Mexican E-Prix here. The 25-year-old, the only rookie this season, had a promising qualifying, finishing the session in ninth place in Group A, with a time of 1m14.469s, which was sixth-tenths off what group topper Robin Frijns achieved.

However, that was not enough to take him to the Duels, which meant he lined up at the latter half of the grid at the 17th spot for the race.

Driving for Maserati MSG Racing, Jehan, who has made the switch to electric racing after spending four years on Formula 2, was able to make some ground and rose to 15th at the first corner but soon fell back to 17th by the end of the first lap.—*AP*

Ian Chappell slams 'abysmal' pace of play in Test cricket

NEW DELHI, 14 JAN

The T20 boom has threatened the existence of Test cricket but what is also hurting the red-ball game is the "abysmal pace of play", reckons Australian great Ian Chappell.In a column for ESPNcricinfo, Chappell blamed the batters for wasting too much time in the middle."The pace of play in Test cricket is abysmal. It's slowing every day and nothing is being done to improve matters."On the one hand Ben Stokes genuinely strives to improve the entertainment quotient of Test cricket but he's being undermined by the administrators' lack of initiative," he wrote before asking some pertinent questions.—*AP*

Indian shooters pick up more gold in Jakarta

JAKARTA, 14 JAN

Indian shooters continued to hit the bullseye in the Asia Olympic Qualifiers here on Sunday, with Yogesh Singh winning the men's 25m individual standard pistol gold before combining with Amit Kumar and Om Prakash to claim the team event.At the Olympic qualifiers for shotgun discipline in Kuwait City, at least two women trap shooters were favorably placed after day one of qualification, to make the top six finals cut on Monday.Yogesh shot 572 to clinch the standard pistol gold and then partnered with Amit (565) and Prakash (553) for the team gold in the event, bringing India's overall podium finishes to a whopping 32, including 14 gold and 10 silver.—*AP*

India beat Afghanistan for 6th time in a row in T20I

Jaiswal and Dube go full-throttle as India seal series win

INDORE, 14 JAN

Riding on a flurry of mighty maximums, Shivam Dube and Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed Afghanistan's bowlers to smithereens with swashbuckling half-centuries as India made short work of a 173-run target to win the second T20I by six wickets here on Sunday.

While Yashasvi got out after hammering 68 off 34 balls, including six sixes, Dube ended unbeaten on a 32-ball 63, hitting four maximums in the process. India completed the chase with 26 balls to spare, taking an unassailable lead in the three-match series. Gulbadin Naib top-scored with a breezy 35-ball 57 before the lower-order batters Mujeeb Ur Rahman (21 off 9 balls) and Karim Janat (20 off 10) chipped in with useful contributions to lift Afghanistan to 172 all out.

India's chase began on an eventful note that saw a first-ball boundary by Yashasvi Jaiswal, a loud shout for an LBW and an unsuccessful Afghanistan review, and a first-ball duck for Rohit Sharma.In his first T20I since November 2022, Virat Kohli began with a lovely boundary before Jaiswal smashed Fazalhaq Farooqi for two sixes.

Recreating the famous shot he played against Haris Rauf in the last T20 World Cup at MCG, Kohli hit a short-of-a-length Naveen-ul-Haq delivery back over the bowler's head for a four. On that night in Australia though, it was a six.

Having switched ends, Mujeeb leaked 19 runs with Jaiswal collecting three fours and Kohli one. However, Naveen-ul-Haq cut short Kohli's highly promising stay at the crease by having the maestro caught at mid-off for a 16-ball 29.

Unperturbed by Kohli's dismissal, the duo of Jaiswal and Dube brutally went about their task, leaving the Afghan bowlers bruised and battered. Asked to bat first, Afghanistan opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz signaled his intent straight-away and flicked Arshdeep Singh (3/32 in 4 overs) for a four through square leg and then tried to hit one straight down the ground, which however did not result in a boundary.

Trailing 0-1 in the three-match series, Afghanistan raced to 20 for no loss in no time, forcing Rohit Sharma to introduce spin in the form of Ravi Bishnoi (2/39 in 4 overs).Taking a cue from Gurbaz's approach, one-down batter Gulbadin Naib started to play his shots from the get-go, pulling Mukesh through mid-wicket and then driving him through for successive fours.

India 173 for 4 (Jaiswal 68, Dube 63*, Janat 2-13) beat Afghanistan 172 (Naib 57, Arshdeep 3-32, Axar 2-17, Bishnoi 2-39) by six wickets. —*PTI*

PLAYER OF THE MATCH AXAR PATEL INDIA 2/17

Shivam Dube and Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed Afghanistan's bowlers to smithereens with swashbuckling half-centuries as India made short work of a 173-run target to win the second T20I by six wickets PHOTO: PTI

MALAYSIA OPEN

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty finished second PHOTO: AP

Satwik-Chirag pair finishes second

KUALA LUMPUR, 14 JAN

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty faltered at the finishing line to end their dream run at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 with a narrow loss in the men's doubles final against world No. 1 Chinese Liang Wei keng and Wang Chang here on Sunday.

Satwik and Chirag, the Asian Games gold medallists, squandered an opening game advantage and an 11-7 lead in the decider to go down 21-9 18-21 17-21 to Liang and Wang in the summit clash which saw both the pairs displaying some exquisite strokeplay.

"We are happy with how we played in the tournament but a little disappointed that we couldn't control our nerves. "We played under a lot more pressure than them towards the end and made silly mistakes but they kept pressing us. Hopefully, we will take revenge next time," Satwik said after the match.

"I was expecting it to be tough after the change of ends. We thought we should keep a 4-5 lead and it would be nice going into the last stretch. Things were a bit here and there and then they were 12-12. The same situation happened in the Malaysia Open and All England last year." It was a fourth defeat for the Indian pair against Liang and Wang, having lost three of their last four meetings all in 2023. The only time Satwik and Chirag had emerged victorious was during their title-winning run at the Korea Open Super 500 last year.

"Coach (Mathias Boe) said that we should keep the racquet up and move our foot. We knew they would come back, we should have been calmer and they played exceedingly well," Chirag said. —*AP*

Karnataka produced a solid bowling performance, led by medium-pacer Vasuki Koushik's three-wicket haul PHOTO:X

Karnataka pacer Koushik's 3-wkt spell troubles Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 14 JAN

Karnataka produced a solid bowling performance, led by medium-pacer Vasuki Koushik's three-wicket haul, to leave Gujarat at 171 for seven on day 3 of their Group C Ranji Trophy match here on Sunday. Resuming at 328 for 5, Karnataka managed to add another 46 runs before being shot out for 374 to earn a 110-run lead. Gujarat were all out for 264 in their first innings. In their second essay, Gujarat began on a shaky note, losing four wickets for 52. Manan Hingrajia (56) and Kshitij Patel (26) then put on a 57-run stand for the fifth wicket. Koushik eventually broke the partnership, getting rid of Kshitij, while Rohit Kumar (2/42) dismissed Hingrajia.At the end of the day's play, Gujarat's score read 171 for seven, leading by 61 runs.

Umang Kumar (29) and Chintan Gaja (8) were at the crease at stumps.In another Group C game at Porvorim, Kunal Mahajan's unbeaten 109 led Chandigarh's fightback against Goa on Sunday.Resuming the day on 73 for one, Chandigarh lost Arpit Pannu (9) early but Arslan Khan (84) completed his fifty. However, Chandigarh lost three more wickets to slip to 200 for five. Mahajan then tagged along with Raj Bawa (64 not out) adding an unbeaten partnership of 148 runs for the sixth wicket. —*PTI*

Everton and Aston Villa play out a lively draw

LONDON, 14 JAN

Aston Villa missed the chance to move level on points with Premier League leaders Liverpool as Everton held them to a goalless draw at Goodison Park.

Both sides thought they broke the deadlock in the first half for very different reasons. Alex Moreno's opener for Villa was ruled out by VAR for offside on Leon Bailey in the build-up, while Dominic Calvert-Lewin later missed a sitter by firing straight at Emiliano Martinez when clean through on goal.

As Villa's urgency continued, Everton put bodies on the line late on to deny Matty Cash and John McGinn from close range, while Jhon Duran was inches away from snatching the lead late on but prodded wide a cross from the right. —*AP*

Liverpool as Everton held them to a goalless dra PHOTO: AP

India stay alive with 3-1 win over NZ

RANCHI, 14 JAN

In the quest for a spot at the Paris Olympics later this year, the Indian women's hockey team, led by Savita Punia, secured a decisive victory against New Zealand with a scoreline of 3-1 in their second Group B game of the tournament.

Sangita Kumari opened the scoring with a field goal in the 1st minute, setting the tone for India's attacking approach to the game. Udita doubled the lead in the 12th minute with a precise penalty corner conversion.

Shortly after, Beauty Dung Dung further extended India's advantage by finding the back of the net with another field goal in the 14th minute. Salima Tete was awarded the Player of the Match for her exceptional all-round display.

Indian women's hockey team, led by Savita Punia, secured a decisive victory against New Zealand PHOTO: PTI

The team had previously faced a morale-crushing 0-1 loss in the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifiers in Ranchi. Looking ahead, India is set to play against Italy in their final group clash scheduled for 16 January. —*PTI*

PAK vs NZ: Shaheen Afridi's Pakistan lose second T20I

HAMILTON, 14 JAN

Pakistan lost the second T20I against New Zealand by 21 runs at the Seddon Park in Hamilton on Sunday, January 14. Pakistan were bundled out for 173 while chasing 195 as New Zealand took a 2-0 lead.

Babar Azam once again top-scored for Pakistan with 66 runs off 43 balls, and Fakhar Zaman also chipped in with a 25-ball 50-run knock, but both the efforts went in vain. Openers Saim Ayub (1) and Mohammad Rizwan (7) failed. Iftikhar Ahmed (40 and Azam Khan (2) also could not do much.

Captain Shaheen Afridi scored 22 runs off 13 balls towards the end, but that did not help Pakistan cross the line.

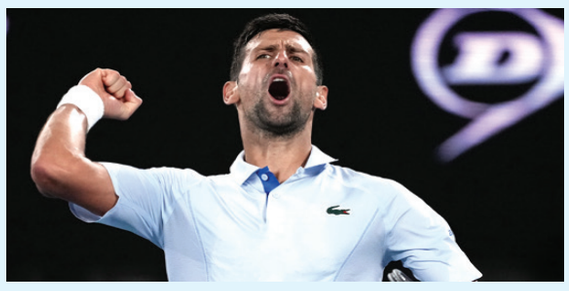
New Zealand's right-arm pacer finished with figures of 4/33. Tim Southee, Ben Sears, and Ish Sodhi picked two wickets each.

—*AP*

Djokovic beats Dino Prizmic in his longest first-round match

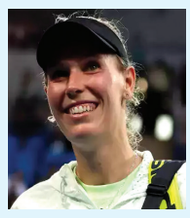
MELBOURNE, 14 JAN

The Serb, chasing a record-extending 11th men's title, needed four hours and one minute to beat the 18-year-old Croat 6-2 6-7 (5-7) 6-3 6-4.Prizmic, playing in his first Grand Slam match, saved six match points before Djokovic secured victory."He gave me a run for my money," Djokovic said in an on-court interview.The 36-year-old, who is aiming for a record 25th Grand Slam singles title, will face Alexei Popyrin or Marc Polmans in the second round.In rallies that echoed those in matches between Djokovic and world number two Carlos Alcaraz, world number 178 Prizmic sprinted and stretched all over the court to excite the Melbourne night-session crowd.The match surpassed Djokovic's previous longest in the first round of a major, which was a three-hour-57-minute encounter against Gael Monfils at the US Open in 2005."He deserves all the applause. He is an amazing player, he handled himself incredibly well on the court. This is his moment," Djokovic said."It could easily have been his match as well. He showed great mentality and resilience."I certainly want to be in his corner. So hopefully he will invite me because he will do some big things in his career that's for sure."Fifth seed Andrey Rublev survived a comeback from world number 78 Thiago Seyboth Wild to win a five-set thriller 7-5 6-4 3-6 4-6 7-6 (10-6), while Croatia's 2018 runner-up Marin Cilic lost 6-1 2-6 6-2 7-5 to Hungarian Fabian Marozsan.Former semi-finalist Matteo Berrettini withdrew before his first-round match against Stefanos Tsitsipas because of a foot injury. —*AP*



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning PHOTO:PTI

- Former Australian Open champion Caroline Wozniacki said she hoped her young children were in bed after progressing to the second round when Magda Linette retired injured on Sunday.



Japan holds mighty Germany in the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifier

RANCHI, 14 JAN

A resolute Japan played out of their skin to hold world no. 5 Germany to a 1-1 draw in their second Pool A match of the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifier here on Sunday.

The Germans controlled the proceedings for a major part of the match, earning as many as 15 penalty corners, but failed to break Japan's defense led by goalkeeper Eika Nakamura.

Nakamura was brilliant under the goal as she came up with some brilliant saves to keep Germany at bay.

Lisa Nolte (30th minute) scored for Germany from a field effort, while Miyu Hasegawa (45th) equalized for Japan.

The game was about Germany's relentless attacks and Japan's defending.

In the first quarter itself, Germany secured as many as four penalty corners but they were up against a determined Nakamura in front of Japan's goal, as she did not put a foot wrong in the match, or else the scoreline could have been different. —*PTI*

WHEN CRICKET MEETS TENNIS

Virat Kohli and Novak's mutual admiration club

MUMBAI, 14 JAN

Indian cricket icon Virat Kohli on Sunday opened up about the mutual admiration he shares with Serbian tennis legend Novak Djokovic in a heart-warming tale of cross-sport camaraderie.

It all started when Kohli reached out to the record 24-time Major champion on social media with a simple greeting.

But to his surprise, the tennis maestro had already messaged him, marking the beginning of their friendship.

"I got in touch with Novak very organically, I was just looking at his profile once on Instagram and I just happened to press the message button. I thought I'll just say hello, maybe," Kohli revealed on BCCI Twitter ahead of his T20 comeback against Afghanistan at Indore.

"But then I checked it again and it was legitimate. And then, yeah, we got talking. We keep exchanging messages now and then. I congratulated him for all his amazing achievements." The two athletes quickly found common ground, regularly exchanging congratulatory messages on their respective achievements. They both are also the epitome of supreme fitness allowing them to excel even in their mid-30s.

Novak Djokovic and Virat Kohli PHOTO: PTI

Djokovic also congratulated Kohli on his 50th ODI century, by posting an Instagram story, a gesture that resonated deeply with the Indian cricketing great.

"When I got my 50th century recently, he put out a story and he sent me a very nice message as well. So, there's been mutual admiration and respect.

"It's nice to connect with global athletes who are, you know, excelling at a high level. And I think, collectively, what I think about it is sending out a message of inspiration to the next generation in a way.

"I have a lot of respect for him, his journey, his passion for fitness, something that I dearly follow myself and believe in a lot. So there's a lot to connect on.

"Hopefully If he comes to India sooner, I happen to be in a country where he is playing. I will definitely catch up with him and just chill out and maybe have a cup of coffee." Kohli's message for Djokovic came hours after the 36-year-old tennis told the Sony Sports Network that they both are "text buddies".

"Virat Kohli and I have been texting a bit for a few years. We never got a chance to meet in person, but it was an honor and a privilege to hear him speak nicely about me.

"I admire all of his career and achievements. I started to play cricket, but I'm not very good at it. But I have a task to perfect my cricket skills before I come to India, and don't embarrass myself when I'm there," Djokovic said. —*PTI*

- Indian cricket icon Virat Kohli on Sunday opened up about the mutual admiration he shares with Serbian tennis legend Novak Djokovic in a heart-warming tale of cross-sport camaraderie.